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O'Dwyer must resist big business pressure on casuals

The peak body for working people has called on new Industrial Relations Minister Kelly O'Dwyer to resist big business pressure to intervene in an employer court challenge to a decision that grants so-called "permanent casuals" basic rights to paid leave.

Yesterday Australian Industry Group head Innes Willox released a list of business demands ahead of a meeting with O'Dwyer.

They included the Minister intervening in an expected High Court challenge by Australia's largest labour hire firm Workpac against a ruling by a full bench of the Federal Court that they had falsely classified a truck driver who worked a fixed and continuous pattern of work as casual. The court ordered that he be paid accrued annual leave.

AlG's demands also included fast-tracking laws that would weaken the rights and negotiating position of working people, tipping the balance of IR laws even further in the favour of big business.

The pressure from the business lobby comes at a time when the power imbalance in our workplace laws has already caused record-low wages growth. In a recent ReachTel poll commissioned by the ACTU, four out of five people in paid employment said they hadn't had a pay rise that keeps up with the cost of living, with nearly half receiving no pay rise at all.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

"Minister O'Dwyer has been in the job only a few days and big business is already issuing decrees for her to carry out."

"It will be a test of the Minister's commitment to fairness for working people whether she is able to resist the pressure and demands from the big business lobby and stand up for working people.

"Employers are abusing a loophole in our laws to call people who have regular and ongoing work casuals. This denies them rights, leave and pay.

"I call on Minister O'Dwyer to change the Fair Work Act so that casual work is properly and fairly defined, to stop the casualisation of the workforce by big business owners.

"Casual work is one part of our insecure work crisis – Australia has one of the highest rates of insecure work in the OECD.

"The Minister has an opportunity to re-shape the role of Industrial Relations Minister, coming to the position after Michaelia Cash abused state power to pursue working people's representatives.

"I invite Kelly O'Dwyer to restore fairness to our workplaces so people can get pay rises that keep up with living costs, and the job security they need."

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