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457 visa system is broken: ACTU calls for major reform of occupation list

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) welcomes the introduction of Labor leader Bill Shorten's private member's bill to review the 457 visa system.

The Migration Amendment (Putting Local Workers First) Bill 2016 calls for stronger labour market testing, stricter licensing criteria for 457 workers and more restrictions for employers.

The ACTU believes the 457 visa system is broken; the occupation list for temporary workers continues to be rorted and needs a complete review.

The list currently includes 651 occupations and the ACTU believes it bears little resemblance to areas of genuine skills shortage.

Young Australians are finding it increasingly difficult to find an apprenticeship, yet employers continue to sponsor temporary foreign workers rather than train our kids.

The ACTU also has serious concerns about systemic exploitation of temporary workers, as highlighted in the 7 Eleven scandal and outlined in the Senate report *A National Disgrace: The Exploitation of Temporary Work Visa Holders*. The exploitation of temporary visa workers has been happening far too often and for far too long for it to be dismissed as a few isolated cases in an otherwise well-functioning program.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Ged Kearney:

"The ACTU believes it is time for a complete revision of the skilled migration program. The current skilled migrant visa program is fundamentally flawed; it allows employers to force people to work for sub-par wages and conditions, which undermine local wages, conditions and employment.

"Temporary visa arrangements, whether 457, backpacker or student visas, open the door to exploitation, with the fear of deportation or being exposed to visa violation charges being a constant threat."

"The current temporary occupation list has numerous occupations which are being rorted and used for low skilled professions. 457 visas are meant to fill genuine skills gap with specialised workers. Instead, workers are coming in and doing entry level jobs like retail shop assistants and kitchenhands. And the current list includes nurses, engineers, electricians, motor mechanics and joiners."

"Australia also has double digit youth unemployment and more than one million underemployed people who need more work. Employers who employ skilled migrants must be obliged to train and hire locally before employing temporary visa holders."

"The ACTU is calling for a complete review of the list — from the bottom up. We do not want to see tinkering of the list with useless caveats. The program must have a full *proper* tripartite review mechanism and substantial rigorous labour market testing should be broadened out to cover all occupations under the 457 temporary worker list."

ENDS

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