

Tuesday, 5 September 2017

## Senate amends vulnerable workers' bill to protect right to silence for 11 million workers

The Australian Council of Trade Unions welcomes the Senate's support for an ALP amendment to the Vulnerable Workers' bill that removes coercive powers that could have denied the right to silence for 11 million Australian workers.

Had the original Bill passed, it would have seen all working Australians lose the right to silence if government investigation into unprotected industrial action was initiated.

The measure could have adversely affected workers like those at Fairfax, who took unprotected industrial action when their employer announced widespread redundancies.

The coercive powers knocked back by the Senate were found in the fine print of the Vulnerable Workers Bill, a piece of legislation that was supposed to protect workers. This included a provision that if workers refused to give evidence against their work mates or their union, they could have been fined \$126,000.

The Bill which was supposedly to form the government's response to shocking revelations of wage theft from workers at 7/11, was watered down considerably after intense lobbying by former Turnbull Government Minister Bruce Billson, working as representative of the Franchise Council of Australia.

### Quotes attributable to Ged Kearney, ACTU President:

"We warmly welcome the decision by the Australian Labor Party and members of the cross bench Nick Xenophon Team, the Greens, Jacqui Lambie and Derryn Hinch who have ensured that workers' civil liberties outside the construction and maritime industries are protected.

"This was a desperate play by a government in crisis. We know when the Liberals are in trouble they do whatever they can to attack working people and their unions.

"It's a disgrace that the Turnbull Government would even attempt this trick by hiding these coercive powers inside a Bill that was supposed to protect workers.

"Thankfully, the ALP and enough Senate cross bench stood up and defended the interests of working people. It is very disappointing that One Nation, the South Australian independent, Lucy Gichuhi and David Leyonhjelm refused to support the amendment protecting working people.

"Attacking unions makes inequality worse. We are campaigning to change the rules so workers have more secure jobs and higher pay.

"Right now there's a crisis of inequality in Australia. People need more secure work and higher wages. It would be simply delightful for the government to try and address this issue rather than finding new and innovative ways to attack the rights of working people in order to give corporations more power.

**ENDS**

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