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Unions pledge to tackle the growing crisis of insecure work in Australia with a national campaign

Better rights for casual and contract workers, a much larger investment in Australia's workforce and an overhaul of our welfare system will be the building blocks of reforms to undo the damage caused by the spread of insecure work, say unions.

The ACTU Congress today welcomed the report of the Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work, *Lives on Hold: Unlocking the potential of Australia's workforce*, which analyses the extent of the problem now affecting 40% of the workforce and sets out possible solutions.

The report is the result of a six month national inquiry, chaired by former Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said that the Congress had committed the union movement to campaigning to improve job security for people who were unfortunate enough to find themselves in insecure work.

"The title of this report says it all," Ms Kearney said.

"People in casual, labour hire and contracting jobs are literally putting their lives on hold because they have no job or income security to plan for the future.

"Mr Howe sums up the challenge in the report when he says the new divide among Australian workers is the gap between secure and insecure employment.

"It is within this gap that workers' rights fall down.

"It is a blight on such a prosperous nation as Australia that around 40 % of the workforce does not have the same rights as those in secure jobs – and some have little or none.

"The issue of insecure work bleeds into households and the community. It makes it difficult to meet the living costs of the present or to plan for the future. This cannot be left unaddressed and the union movement will campaign for secure jobs."

Congress endorsed an industrial and legislative agenda that includes these immediate priorities:

- Improved regulation of the labour market that provides all workers with a universal set of protections and entitlements;
- Reducing and removing the ability of employers to shift economic risk onto their workforce; and
- Measures to provide better protections to workers employed indirectly through labour hire and agency arrangements, and eliminate disguised employment arrangements like sham contracting.

"We believe there do need to be changes to workplace laws to give workers in insecure work more protection.

“But there are a number of ways we can pursue better protections for workers and the Howe Inquiry found solutions are a lot broader than simply a question of regulation.

“We need to invest a lot more in our workforce, we need to reform our welfare system and we need to improve the bargaining system so workers can pursue their rights.

“We believe that casual workers need more protections and we need to tackle sham contracting and we also need to provide more protection to people who get their work through labour hire,” Ms Kearney said.

“The report is the result of the most thorough analysis of the issue of insecure work, its causes, its effects on individuals, communities, workplaces and the economy, ever undertaken in Australia,” Ms Kearney said.

“The ACTU thanks Brian Howe and the members of the Inquiry Panel, Paul Munro, Sara Charlesworth and Jill Biddington, for their work over the past six months.

“The Inquiry was a massive undertaking but it was well worth it – the Independent Inquiry has set out a clear road map for how the problem of insecure work can be addressed,” Ms Kearney said.

The panel’s extensive investigations included two months of public submissions which received 521 submissions, before another six weeks of hearings across 23 locations around Australia, with experts, community groups and workers all shedding light onto the issue.

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