

16/11/2012

ACTU call for return to WorkChoices will not lift productivity; BCA call for cooperation is the right way

Claims by the Australian Industry Group that more companies will close and more jobs will be sent offshore if we do not change the Fair Work Act to limit worker and union rights are a scare campaign, the ACTU said today.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the AIG was ignoring the real drivers of productivity and wanted to impose an agenda that would leave ordinary workers worse off.

"The recent review of the Fair Work Act debunked the idea that Australia's workplace system is holding back productivity growth," Ms Kearney said.

"In fact Australia's fastest productivity growth of recent time was in the 1990s, and productivity rates slowed under the Howard Government.

"Increasing productivity is crucial to create jobs and keep Australia's standard of living. But the AIG needs to recognise that increasing productivity is a complex business."

"Long-term productivity increases will come from investment in infrastructure, education and skills training, and better management by companies.

"Productivity is about better using workers and their skills, not about cutting their pay and conditions."

Ms Kearney said the AIG's call for more 'flexibility' in the workplace, was simply code for shifting more people into insecure forms of work, or cutting conditions like penalty rates.

"This alleged flexibility means more people on short-term contracts, in labour hire, or in casual work," Ms Kearney said.

"The AIG needs to respect the fact that the Australian people have voted against Work Choices at the last two elections, and they expect fair treatment in the workplace.

By contrast the ACTU welcomed the call from Business Council of Australia President, Tony Shepherd, to "return to an era where different sectors were able to agree on a common purpose and a plan to foster productivity".

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver, said that he had today written to the BCA and the Prime Minister, reiterating the ACTUs' willingness to participate in a cooperative tripartite debate on productivity.

"The major challenges confronting our country can be addressed by constructive engagement and cooperation between business, government, and the union movement," said Mr Oliver.

"A genuine debate would be about improving management systems, innovation, infrastructure and skills, not the low road of attacking workers take-home pay."

Media contact:

Ben Ruse ph 0409 510 879