

Thursday, 20 October 2011

Secure jobs are the key to ending poverty: unions

Insecure work is trapping people in poverty so that they are struggling to meet the cost of housing, let alone other necessities, say unions.

Speaking at an Anti-Poverty Week roundtable today, ACTU President Ged Kearney said the key to Australians finding their way out of poverty is access to secure work.

The roundtable is hosted by the Australian Services Union as part of Anti-Poverty Week 2011, which runs until Saturday.

The ACTU's Working Australia Census 2011 analysed a group of workers in insecure work arrangements, finding more than half of men and women surveyed listed meeting the cost of housing as among their top financial concerns for the year ahead.

"More than half of women and almost half of men surveyed said they were concerned about the cost of household bills," Ms Kearney said.

"When Australians think about people in poverty, we often think about the unemployed, but the reality is that more needs to be done to help both those who cannot find employment, and the 40% of people in work who don't have a secure job.

"A Newstart allowance of \$35 a day is simply inadequate for unemployed Australians to afford food and clothing which will improve their chances of getting a job. Newstart must be increased, and indexed against the CPI.

"But more must also be done to ensure that those jobs are secure, because work is not always a way out of poverty.

"There is an important link between people's employment status and their chances of being in working poverty. Those who are casuals for example can legally have their employment terminated at a moment's notice, have no guaranteed hours and are ineligible for rights, including maternity leave or the right to request flexible hours.

"Low pay, poor progression opportunities, a lack of access to services such as good quality childcare and the ongoing gender pay gap are some of the reasons workers in insecure jobs are vulnerable to poverty even though they are deemed to be in work.

"Insecure work is about employers creating a way to shift costs from employers onto workers, and it is spreading into sectors that were once seen as havens for permanent and secure jobs, like education, manufacturing and construction.

"People can spend years in an insecure job, with unpredictable hours and volatile income, and with fewer entitlements, because this work suits the boss. But workers want a job they can rely on. And you can't rely on insecure work."

For more information go to www.securejobs.org.au

Rebecca Tucker ph (03) 9664 7359 or 0408 031 269; rtucker@actu.org.au