

Tuesday, 22 November 2011

## Unions condemn employer militancy, pledge to improve and strengthen workers' rights

Unions have today resolved to vigorously defend workers' rights against a new wave of employer militancy that is threatening the livelihoods of working Australians.

A meeting of unions in Melbourne today has condemned the antagonistic and counter-productive behaviour of Australian employers emboldened by the Qantas dispute, and pledged to strengthen protections for workers' rights against being railroaded by aggressive tactics by business.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the peak body's Executive had today resolved to seek improvements to the Fair Work Act, including allowing workers better rights to bargain for job security and strengthening access to arbitration in an even-handed manner.

"A new pattern of industrial militancy by employers has emerged following the reckless and disproportionate action of Qantas management to ground its entire fleet and threaten to lock out its workforce last month," Ms Kearney said.

"This deliberate escalation needlessly disrupted the plans of tens of thousands of passengers and caused enormous damage to the national economy and to Qantas' reputation. It is of serious concern that Alan Joyce and Qantas management claim to have had other major employers endorse this action.

"It is clear employers have been emboldened by Qantas' action, in particular Liberal State Governments, including the Baillieu Government in Victoria, which prepared a secret strategy to provoke an escalation of the dispute with the state's nurses. None of this is in the spirit of bargaining in good faith, as envisaged by the Fair Work Act.

"Productive and co-operative industrial relations are not achieved by declaring war on a company's workforce and customers. Workers should be able to seek secure jobs and better pay and conditions without threats of lock-outs, big fines or punitive legal action, the use of strike-breakers or thugs to physically disrupt peaceful picket lines, or by other similar tactics.

"Harmonious and productive industrial relations are achieved through genuine negotiation and engagement with workers and their unions, not by making them the enemy. Responsible business and political leaders should disown such tactics as counterproductive in the workplace and contrary to the national interest."

The ACTU Executive today resolved to pursue explicit reforms in the ALP platform at next month's national conference to improve the ability of workers to negotiate for secure jobs, and to strengthen the rights of workers to have access to arbitration to settle disputes.

"Secure jobs matter to all workers. With 40% of the workforce in casual, contract or labour hire employment, unions are determined to campaign in workplaces and communities for a better future for these workers.

"We will take this campaign to next week's ALP Conference and beyond," Ms Kearney said.

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