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Coalition splits over insecure work crisis

A coalition-dominated committee led by Barnaby Joyce and including George Christensen has split from the party over the insecure work crisis, recommending changes to the Fair Work Act to stop mining companies destroying good, secure jobs through the use of labour hire companies that casualise the work.

The House Standing Committee on Innovation, Industry, Science and Resources has recommended that Industrial Relations Minister Kelly O'Dwyer conduct a review of casualised workforces and labour hire companies in mining and other sectors with a view to amending the Fair Work Act.

The key recommendation says the Fair Work Act should be changed “to prohibit the move towards replacing directly-employed, full time workers with ‘permanent casual’ employees, and other similar casualised employee types”.

It also recommends the Fair Work Act be changed to guarantee people employed as casuals the legal right to convert to permanent work after a set period of time – something that unions have already won for workers covered by awards.

This comes at the same time as the Industrial Relations Minister has intervened to support a huge labour hire corporation in a major Federal Court case on casual employment.

The stunning about-face in the committee report comes after several years of Coalition MPs and cabinet ministers denying the existence of problems with insecure work, labour hire and the erosion of good, secure jobs for working people.

The report fails to acknowledge the need to have an objective definition of casual work or the need to prevent big business owners using labour hire to undercut the wages of directly employed workers.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

“Everybody needs a job they can count on, but under the Abbott/Turnbull/Morrison Government, work is more insecure than ever before.

“Australia already has one of the highest proportions of temporary labour in the OECD, and big mining companies are abusing loopholes in our laws to avoid respecting the basic rights of the people working for them.

“George Christensen, Barnaby Joyce and the other Morrison Government MPs representing working people in mining regions know they are toast at the election if the Morrison Government continues to allow big business to casualise what should be good secure jobs.

“We need to change the rules and close the loopholes that allow business to destroy good, secure jobs through the use of labour hire and other underhanded tactics.

“This means making sure people can negotiate deals where they get the same pay for doing the same work, whether they’re employed directly or through a labour hire company.

“It also means putting a proper definition of casual in the Fair Work Act so that these loopholes are closed and that working people’s basic rights are restored.

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