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Cedar meats shows why we need special laws to stop second wave Coronavirus spread

The ACTU has renewed calls for stronger workplace health and safety laws to be put in place before the mass return to work after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted following an admission by the owner of Cedar Meats, the epicentre of a 45 person coronavirus cluster, that they “comply with all the requirements we are forced to comply with”.

This shows that business does only what is required of them by law and that “advice” and “guidance” is a flimsy protection for workers in the face of a profit motive.

With 45 workers isolated and the facility closed for two weeks questions are also being raised about the workers’ access to leave and whether or not pandemic leave has been granted

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

“Cedar Meats where 45 people have been infected shows why our current health and safety laws are inadequate to deal with the Coronavirus.

“In order to avoid a second wave of infections we need better protections and strong enforcement. Physical distancing is absolutely essential in all workplaces to minimise the chances of the virus spreading, we need laws to ensure this happens as it cannot be “business as usual” when workplaces reopen.

“The labour hire workers at Cedar Meats, like other casual workers, would not get sick leave and visa workers have even fewer protections, this means they are less likely to stay at home or get tested if they have mild symptoms they might mistake for the flu.

“All workers need to know they can go and get tested and isolate if they have any symptoms whatsoever without losing income. This is the only way to ensure all workers are encouraged to be tested and to isolate. We know the high rate of casualisation in our workforce is a big risk to the virus spreading again. We can address this by giving all workers paid pandemic leave so they do not go to work when sick.

“During a pandemic, no workplace is an island. It will not be just the 45 workers who are effected because of weak compliance and no paid pandemic leave, it will be everyone they came in contact with. It only takes one workplace for an outbreak to occur and the whole community is affected, we will face this en-mass if the economy is to reopen, so let’s learn from this example and put in place all the protections we need to give Australia the best chance of reopening safely.”

ENDS

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