

Thursday 27 October 2022

Finally, action on wage growth

The Albanese Government has acted on their election promise to get wages moving and make workplaces fairer for women with the introduction of the *Secure Jobs, Better Pay Bill*.

This Bill takes important steps towards modernising our bargaining system to help Australians get the pay rises they deserve, and to begin to address the unprecedented real wage cuts they are experiencing. Collective bargaining is the engine of wage growth but has not been working for ten years, with only one in seven workers today covered by a collective agreement.

Whilst these are important steps forward, the union movement is concerned that restricting access to new bargaining options, including by locking many workers out and the failure to remove red tape that encumbers workers may limit its effectiveness.

The legislation also contains significant and long-overdue reforms to make workplaces more respectful and equitable for women including stronger laws to tackle the gender pay gap and stop sexual harassment in workplaces.

Fulfilling election promises to abolish the wasteful and politicised bodies of the previous Government is welcome, but more needs to be done to stop wage theft across the economy.

Whilst the Bill makes a start on delivering Labor's election commits to make jobs more secure, by putting limits on fixed term contracts, much more needs to be done, especially for workers in casual, gig or labour hire work.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

"We must get wages moving in this country. People are working hard, but they are now seeing their wages go dramatically backwards after a decade of seeing them go nowhere. This cannot continue. Australians deserve to see the benefits of their hard work, especially at a time when CEO pay packets have increased 41 per cent and profits for big business by 25 per cent.

"The wages crisis will not be fixed unless workers have a modern collective bargaining system that gives them the ability to win fair pay rises. We welcome the Albanese Government acting on its election promise to get wages moving. Working people desperately need this change.

"Whilst we welcome the introduction of the Secure Jobs, Better Pay Bill as an important step forward in many areas, especially on women's equality and respectful workplaces, we are concerned that too many workers will be shut out of the proposed new bargaining options either automatically or because the bar to access it is too high. Additionally, the Bill does not simplify or remove the red tape that makes the process of obtaining protected industrial action for workers unnecessarily long and difficult, in fact it adds more red tape.

"It is predictable that the same employers who have been able to keep wages low for a decade are opposing change. If they agreed to pay rises that recognised workers' contribution to their profits and productivity, we wouldn't have a wage crisis. No doubt they will do everything they can to stop change whilst workers continue to struggle to pay the bills. One thing is for sure, no CEO is struggling to pay their grocery or power bills at the moment and they need to accept other Australians, the workers who

contribute to their success, who care for children and the elderly and care for us all in our hospitals, should not either.”

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