

Friday, 19 December 2014

Government's stealth attack on workers a week before Christmas

The Abbott Government has shown its true colours – at a time when they hope no one is looking – by announcing a wholesale review of Australia's workplace laws that will see wages, conditions and rights at work slashed.

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver said that going after wages and conditions on the Friday afternoon before Christmas was an absolute disgrace.

"The government knows that Australians don't trust them and they know the community won't support any attempt to cut wages, cut conditions and cut rights at work," Mr Oliver said.

"That's why they've announced the terms of reference for the Productivity Commission review into the Fair Work Act today.

"The irony should not be lost on anyone that the Abbott Government has done this at a time when millions of workers around the country will be relying on penalty rates as they work on public holidays such as Christmas Day and New Years Day."

Mr Oliver said that Australian workers were experiencing the equal lowest wage growth in the 17 year history of the wage price index, productivity growth has been extremely strong and workers' share of the pie is lower than it has been.

"Despite what the government's ideological agenda would have you believe, these are the facts.

"The government is deliberately choosing to take the low road of attacking wages and conditions instead of the high road of investment in skills, infrastructure and innovation.

"The message from Australian unions is clear: penalty rates, wages, conditions, safety and rights at work are not up for grabs.

"Union-won conditions are a fundamental pillar of the decent living standards that Australians want protected and we are not going to sit back while the Abbott Government does the bidding of big business and tries to attack them.

"The terms of reference revealed today put the whole workplace system on trial – pay and conditions, rights at work, collective bargaining and unfair dismissal are all on trial by the Productivity Commission."

Mr Oliver said that workers need to understand the scope of this review, because its outcomes will have a direct impact on them.

"The last time the Coalition were in government they put in WorkChoices, the most radical change to our industrial relations system in 100 years," Mr Oliver said.

"This time, despite all their promises, the Coalition clearly intend to try once more to slash wages, conditions and rights at work.

"The government has put its public view that Australian wages and conditions are too high and too generous, and they have blamed workers for the loss of jobs going overseas.

"Given the sensitivity about these issues, the government would only be asking for such a comprehensive review if they were determined to make radical change.

"The Productivity Commission review will be the platform by which the government can change the laws that protect Australian workers and make it easier for business to cut take home pay."

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