

Tuesday, 3 June 2014

It's on – Unions ready to fight for penalty rates

Australian Unions will fight a campaign by the business lobby to cut weekend penalty rates, challenging them today to 'bring it on'.

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver said public opinion was on the side of workers and the Union Movement would not take a backwards step in defending the Australian way of life.

"I say to the business lobby, ACCI Chief Kate Carnell, Tony Abbott, and the Liberal backbench, if you want a fight over weekends in the Australian community, let's do that," Mr Oliver said.

"We know that the vast majority of voters, even a majority of Coalition voters reckon workers who work Sundays should get paid more.

"Workers are still reeling from the harsh Federal Budget that's just been handed down and wondering how they'll make ends meet with increased costs on health, petrol and education, and now they're being confronted with a cut in wages."

Mr Oliver said this was a broad attack on hardworking Australians including nurses, police, ambos, firefighters, pharmacists, miners, retail, hospitality workers and many others.

"We're not going to stand by while the business lobby tries to rip the wages out of their pockets of hard working Australians," Mr Oliver said.

"We will fight this unfair push to cut people's pay in workplaces, we will fight it in the Industrial Tribunal and we will fight it in the community.

"This attack by the business lobby has nothing to do with job creation or productivity, it's about attacking people's pay packets.

"These workers sacrifice their Sundays away from family and friends, they work nights and other unsociable hours, and they should be paid for that.

"Weekends are special – you don't play the AFL Grand Final on a Tuesday morning, kids don't go to school on Saturdays and Sundays. The weekend is important to Australians."

Mr Oliver said there was no evidence linking productivity or employment levels with penalty rates, a finding confirmed only recently by the Fair Work Commission.

"The employers have been trying to go after penalty rates for years and they've never had any evidence to back up their claims about productivity – this is simply about cutting wages.

"Employers have been given the green light by the Abbott Government but I challenge them to convince the public that workers deserve less money. I challenge employers to convince people who have just been hit by a horror budget that must now also take a pay cut."

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