

Tuesday, 12 August 2014

## Aussie workers left in the cold by appalling lack of 457 scrutiny: Unions call for Senate Inquiry

Resource, health and service sector unions are united in calling for a Senate Inquiry into the 457 visa scheme following allegations of widespread rorting.

“Unemployment has hit a 12 year high yet instead of tightening up requirements to import labour – the Government is trying to help employers bypass local workers in the Northern Territory under new designated area migration agreements,” said ACTU President Ged Kearney.

Submissions to a Government Review into the 457 visa scheme closed four months ago and the Government is still yet to release its report.

“The Government is sitting on the report and failing to properly investigate allegations of abuse of the 457 visa program, while at the same time making it easier for employers to bring in foreign workers in the Northern Territory,” said Ms Kearney.

“A Senate Inquiry should focus on ensuring that there is a transparent and regulated system – that before a company is allowed to sponsor a single 457 visa worker they have genuinely exhausted all local options. We need a system that ensures local jobs and training first,” said **Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) National Secretary Paul Bastian**.

“With the construction boom in the resource sector coming to end we will have thousands of construction workers looking for work, but the Government seems intent on destroying the job opportunities of locals while allowing the exploitation of overseas workers,” said **Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) National Secretary Michael O’Connor**.

Unions share concerns that 457 visas are increasingly seen as an alternative to investing in skills training.

“Across the country we are seeing employers reducing apprentice numbers, cutting their investment in training, then complaining they are unable to find skilled workers, all while the youth unemployment rate continues to soar,” said **Electrical Trades Union (ETU) National Secretary Allen Hicks**.

“Our members are also warning that in many specialist trades that involve dangerous work, they are seeing workers hired whose training and skills fail to meet Australian licensing standards,” said Mr Hicks.

**Australian Workers Union (AWU) National Secretary Scott McDine** said the Government seems hell bent on winning the race to the bottom by undermining Australian jobs and job security.

“It’s incumbent on all of us to campaign for quality jobs with decent security, wages and conditions. We don’t want to leave Aussie kids without a future in a jobless wasteland,” Mr McDine said.

**Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) Federal Secretary Lee Thomas** said the 457 visa scheme was initially created as an emergency stop-gap measure used to address critical skills shortages.

“We find it unacceptable that instead of employing locally-educated nursing and midwifery graduates, employers in some health sectors continue to employ increasing numbers of workers from overseas – the current rate is 3,000 to 4,000 annually, a staggering 400 per cent increase since 2005.

“The Government must act, otherwise more than 3,000 nursing and midwifery graduates who still cannot find jobs will soon become a lost generation of highly trained health professionals who are unable to deliver quality care across Australia’s health and aged care sectors.”

**Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) Assistant National Secretary Ian Bray** said the Government should be tightening up migration controls, particularly as unemployment rises around Australia.

“There are hundreds of seafarers with the right qualifications and certificates raring to go. Add to that plumbers, welders, technicians, electricians, truckies, train drivers and we’re talking thousands of people looking for jobs,” said Mr Bray.

There is no problem attracting workers to our industries - the problem is retaining them, said **United Voice Acting National Secretary David O’Byrne** .

“Employers in industries like hospitality and early childhood education and care should be looking at why they have high turnover and why they lose workers to other industries.

“There is a whole range of things, like training and career path development, which need be done before the 457 visa scheme is freed up to make it easier for employers to import guest workers,” said Mr O’Byrne

All unions are united in their call to ensure that when 457 visas are used, strong safeguards exist to ensure that these workers receive exactly the same rights as Australians – that workers are not exploited or employed outside Australian labour-market protections.

"Australia's migration program should not be at the beck and call of big business. A Senate Inquiry is the only way to get to the bottom of this Government’s mess,” said Ms Kearney.

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