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Abbott Government to create underclass of workers

Unions have attacked the Federal Government's move to help employers import guest workers in the Northern Territory under new designated area migration agreements.

"Unemployment is at a 12 year high, job seekers are being targeted in the budget and told to 'Earn or Learn' – yet the Abbott Government has ripped one billion dollars out of skills and training and is now making it easier for employers to bring in cheap, foreign workers," said ACTU President Ged Kearney.

Under the new agreements, the Government is making it easier for businesses to bring in lower skilled workers without them having to meet language, training or minimum salary requirements.

"This creates an underclass of workers and shows quite clearly that the Government has no plan for jobs. The only plan they have is to export Australian jobs and import labour.

"The Federal Government should be tightening up regulations and requirements on employers to import labour, rather than make it easier for them not to employ local labour first.

"The Northern Territory unemployment rate has jumped nearly a full percentage point in just 3 months since April 2014 and in that same time more than a 1000 Territorians have joined the ranks of the unemployed - there are now 6 600 people out of work in the NT," said Ms Kearney.

National unemployment has hit a 12 year high of 6.4% and youth unemployment is at 13.8%.

"Australia is a nation of migration, but this Government is rorting the system to allow business to walk away from their responsibility to train and skill up Australian workers, and to try to drive down wages and conditions," Ms Kearney said.

"We've seen in the past that many employers use skilled migration programs to take advantages of immigrants who don't know enough about our workplace laws, and who are looking to make money to sustain their families overseas.

"If overseas workers don't even have to meet training and English requirements they risk exploitation and exposure to health and safety issues for themselves and their fellow employees."

The ACTU has strongly opposed the opening up of labour programs where business are not required to genuinely try to find local workers.

"Australia's migration program should not be at the beck and call of big business," Ms. Kearney said.

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