

Friday, 26 June 2015

Sacked and exploited workers call for action over 457 visa abuse

A New South Wales miner who was sacked and then made to train up temporary workers on 457 visas to replace him will give evidence to a Senate Inquiry investigating the abuse of Australia's temporary visa system in Sydney today.

Ben Loeve was one of 106 local workers at a coal mine in the NSW town of Boggabri who were made redundant by Downer EDI, while eight employees on 457 visas with less experience and qualifications were retained as the company tried to bring in another 360 workers from overseas.

The Senate Inquiry will also hear from a Filipino worker who was employed on a 457 visa to work on a construction project in the town of Narrabri, north-west of Sydney.

Edwin De Castro was one of 30 Filipino workers employed by Taiwanese company Chia Tung.

They were paid just \$7 - \$10 an hour and housed in shipping containers or forced to sleep with six people to a room in company housing before being thrown out in the middle of the night.

ACTU President Ged Kearney will also address the Senate Inquiry to call for action to ensure the large and growing use of temporary working visas does not impact on job and training opportunities for local workers and lead to exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers.

Unions are calling for caps on temporary visa numbers, tougher requirements for employers to hire local workers before recruiting workers from overseas and stronger training obligations for employers who use 457 visas, including requirements to train Australian apprentices in the same occupations where temporary visa holders are being employed.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Ged Kearney:

"We are seeing workers on temporary visas being exploited while at the same time Australian workers are missing out on job opportunities – the temporary visa system is broken and must be fixed.

"The government needs to cap temporary visa numbers and ensure that employers who use the temporary visa system and trying to hire local workers and investing in training and apprenticeships."

Quote attributable to NSW miner Ben Loeve:

"I have nothing against the Papuan workers who came to work at Downer EDI but I do think it is unjust that the company got us to train them, and then made local workers like myself redundant whilst keeping them on."

Quote attributable to Edwin De Castro:

"I've worked in many places around the world – the Middle East and Asia – and I have never been treated as badly as I have here. I couldn't believe that this was happening to me in Australia and if the union had not got involved I don't know how I would have gone on."

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