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Government plan for Australia's future rests on cuts to wages and conditions

The message for Australian workers out of the Abbott Government's competitiveness announcement today was that wages, conditions and job security are under renewed attack.

"The Abbott Government's competitiveness agenda delivers for the business lobby but gives cold comfort to ordinary working Australians," ACTU President Ged Kearney said.

"Australians know that when the Liberals talk about 'low cost, business friendly, less regulation and more competitive markets', they are actually talking about taking away rights at work.

"Job creation and higher living standards are not borne out of an agenda to cut wages and conditions.

"The Abbott Government had an opportunity to spell out how they were going to create jobs, where those jobs will be and how they were going to help Australian workers into them.

"Instead what we got today was further evidence that this Government's plan for the future rests on cuts to wage and conditions."

Ms Kearney said the announcement of a little over \$200 million for the Vocational Education and Training sector is dwarfed by the \$1 billion they cut from skills and innovation in the Federal Budget just five short months ago.

"Lifting apprenticeship completion rates and providing employers with the skilled and productive employees they need to grow their businesses and our economy is of critical importance but today's announcement is a poor excuse for genuine commitment and investment."

Ms Kearney also questioned the changes to the flawed 457 visa program that has been shown to be poorly targeted and open to rorting.

"With unemployment at a 12 year high, it is mind boggling that the Government is making it easier for employers to bring in foreign workers."

Unions have always maintained that employers must show they have tested the labour market locally before looking for workers overseas, while employers who do recruit workers on 457 visas must also invest in training local workers as well.

Ms Kearney said lowering English standards for 457 visa holders and freezing minimum pay rates for two years will see foreign workers more easily exploited and increases the risk of injuries and deaths at work.

"If workers can't read safety standards and procedures then their lives and their colleague's lives are being put at risk."

Australian Unions have renewed their call for a Senate Inquiry into the 457 visa program to ensure it is a transparent and regulated system that puts local jobs and training first.

"If this is all they have, it would be more credible to say they are not having an industry policy at all," Ms Kearney said.

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