

Thursday, 21 March, 2013

Fair Work changes will support Australian workers and families

New laws introduced today by the Gillard Government will improve fairness in Australian workplaces the ACTU said today.

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver said that the reforms would ensure workers could raise issues with union representatives in workplaces, have access to broader rights to request flexible work arrangements and protect workers from arbitrary rostering changes.

Mr Oliver said the reforms – the result of a major review of the Fair Work Act – were modest changes that would improve the rights of workers.

“The fact that employers are trying to stop these changes shows they are completely removed from any sense of the fairness that Australian workers think should be part of every workplace,” Mr Oliver said.

“They are clearly hoping to send a message to Tony Abbott that he should bring back WorkChoices.

“These changes have come from a long period of consultation that employers were involved in, and one where the government has made concessions to their point of view.

“Allowing workers to talk to union representatives in their lunchrooms about safety or other issues is a basic right.

“Requiring employers to consider the impact on workers’ family and care responsibilities when they introduce major rostering changes is a reform that recognises that many workers also have families to look after.

“Taking action against workplace bullying – a major cause of human misery and lost productivity in Australian workplaces – is long overdue.

“These changes will go a long way to making workplaces fairer.”

Mr Oliver said that despite a scare campaign by employers the Fair Work Act is operating well and not damaging Australia’s productivity or prosperity.

“The reality is that productivity is increasing faster than wages, which means that a bigger proportion of productivity gains are turning into business profits,” Mr Oliver said.

“Business groups should stop running a baseless scare campaign and focus on working with their employees to improve Australia’s productivity.

“The fact that important promised changes to arbitration, which will allow workers to have access to an independent umpire, have been left out is a concern for unions and working people. But we fully expect the Government and the Minister Bill Shorten to honour the commitment given to workers in further amendments to the Fair Work laws.”

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