

Sally McManus, speech to ALP Conference, Adelaide
18 December 2018

Check against delivery

I want to start by acknowledging the Garna people and pay respect to their elders both past and present. I also want to acknowledge any other elders in this room.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.

The trade union movement of our country is sounding an alarm.

It is time to listen and it is time to act.

Working people are crying out for action on insecure jobs and action to bring about fair pay rises.

Insecure work stalks the lives of too many Australians.

Any it is often at Christmas where it is felt the most.

Too many people are stuck on fix term contracts which expire the day before Christmas, only to be reoffered at the end of January.

Too many people are trapped in permanent casual work.

Too many people now have their hours determined by apps and text messages.

Too many working people lose all income at this time of year because they have no paid holidays and they face weeks with no income and uncertainty about their future.

And because of our wage crisis where families cannot keep up with the cost of living too many others can't afford to take any time off. This financial and job insecurity affects spending habits, it affects small business, it affects our tourism industry, our retail industry, our small manufacturers and local businesses.

The alarm is sounding and we must answer the question: Do WE want a society where paid annual leave, paid holidays we fought so hard for are a thing of the past or for the privileged few?

The stress of Christmas is not just felt by those in insecure work, but for all working people where wages rises are at record lows and not keeping up with the rising costs of essentials like housing and utility bills. Working people are now cutting into their savings just to keep up. And there are 700 000 Australians who have had their penalty rates cut.

And now it is Christmas.

Presents for the kids, events with the family, taking time off with loved ones is not for everyone a relaxing time.

The wage increases that would have kept heads above water are not coming and many bank accounts are already empty. For many it is a stressful squeeze.

But I tell you who isn't feeling this squeeze. CEOs are not feeling it as their pay went up by 12%. The billionaires are not feeling the squeeze. The wealth of billionaires in this country INCREASED by \$38 Billion last year.

\$38 Billion – that's our entire federal health budget.

How obscene is it that anyone could be paid what many of our CEOs earn?

No matter their job, no matter their skills or their hours. No one *needs* the millions they receive.

But they don't see it that way, because they are living in another world, a world where they *do not even* see what life is like for the majority of Australians.

Their experience of life is getting more and more distance from ours.

And we feel their disregard and their disrespect, while our frustration and anger at the injustices grows.

With our nation's wealth being hoovered up or shipped offshore, not to be shared with us through fair wage increases or tax funded investments in schools, hospitals and infrastructure, we become more unequal.

Wealth and income inequality are increasing.

It is then little wonder that the Coalition deny there is a problem with the number of insecure jobs. Because how would they know? Do they even have any mates who work for a labour hire company or are in involuntary casual work? Do you think they hang out with anyone on the minimum wage or even on the average wage?

For them, the rest of us are just statistics to be distorted, repackaged or ignored.

And then there is record low wage growth at a time when profits and productivity are up. For them it might be a puzzling economic problem, but not a human one and certainly not a moral one.

It really does astound me that they want to *deny* we have a problem with too many insecure jobs. Even when 40% of people are in them. Even when Australia is actually an outlier in OECD countries with the highest rate of temporary work.

How could this be?

What about when they do their media interviews, don't they realise the cameraperson is now on an ABN and media rooms are full of people on casual work or rolling fixed term contracts?

What about their uber driver, don't they ask how much they are now earning an hour? What about the café's? Do they ever stop and think to themselves, "Why did I take away that person's penalty rates?"

They must *not even see us*.

People, not just in Australia, but around the world are reacting against this inequality. Reacting against Governments who do nothing because they *do not even see us*.

And in Australia, it is a little bit different.

The union movement and the Labor Party were part of making us one of the most equal societies in the world. This is not a statistic, but an ethos, a belief, a national identity. This is what a fair go means. We created it – the labour movement created it - and made it part of us.

So when Scott Morrison talks about a “fair go”, he just doesn’t get it, because he misses the words that cannot be erased, the “fair go” was always about “a fair go for ALL”.

People will not toleration being ignored forever. They will look for ways of making themselves heard and frustration and anger will find an outlet.

It already is.

This is not the direction the trade union movement wants to see our country go, where we are more divided, more separate, more suspicious. Where too many people either feel angry or helpless.

We want a more friendly, cohesive, generous and equal country where we respect each other. Where every generation can be confident and look to something better.

Why did we used to be described as “laid back”? Because fairness made us both confident and comfortable.

Inequality. Greed. Unfairness. Misdirected blame. This all holds us back as a country.

But we in the union movement believe in the fair go and we will not let the consequences of inequality hold us back any longer.

Because we see the obscene salaries and so called performance bonuses of CEOs at a time when the same CEOs refuse pay rises.

We see company profits going up while jobs are casualised.

Just last week we heard, once again that one-third of Australian companies paid no tax, not contributing while their own workers fund the infrastructure that those companies rely on.

We see this – and as the trade union movement, we cannot and will not accept it.

Delegates, it must be up to us to restore the fair go for working people. The Australian Labor Party and the trade union movement have shared this unshakable commitment.

And we are now all called upon to take action to achieve it.

We are called upon to stop and reverse the spread of insecure work; called upon to ensure working people get their fair share of the wealth of our country.

Only Labor can do this, only a Shorten Labor government can do this and we are ready to play our part in reaching out a hand of friendship and cooperation to every good employer who also wants to live in a fair society.

We all believe in a fair go for working people because we ARE working people. Our mates are working people. The Labor party is the party of working people. Here in this room there are people from jobs across our country and so many trade unionists who represent working people every single day.

The people in this room have no doubt we have a problem with too many insecure jobs.

The people in this room know how widespread wage theft is.

We know what happens when big business has too much power as it is us who sit across the table when bargaining. We know we will not be able to win fair pay rising unless the system is rebalanced, unless it works so employers cannot just set up new companies to slash pay, to undercut a bargain, so workers can actually sit down with whoever holds the purse strings, so the system does not promote a race to the bottom on our wages.

We need to rebalance the system, because we know it is way out of balance now.

We know all this because every representative of working people in this room lives and breathes it.

Just as Bill Shorten lived and breathed it - every - single - day.

When you spend decades representing working people you do not forget.

I first met Bill at Clyde Cameron College 24 years ago. He stood out as a leader then and as someone special, someone who had the goods.

What he went on to do as a union organiser, and a union leader never leaves you. It forms who you are and your depth of understanding of the lives of working Australians. Like me, and many in this room, he has stood with working people when they needed support the most.

He was there when they were at their lowest. Taking the desperate calls at night when things seemed at their worst. Being the hand to help you back on your feet.

He learnt to deal with conflict, to resolve it and to stand up to the powerful, when people need you to be strong.

Like all workers representatives learnt about industry, the perspective of the employer, their pressures.

He knows what it is to be accountable to those who elect you and to deliver for those who rely on you.

Like all union officials he intimately understands what it's like when workers have no power, what its like to lose your job, what stresses are on people when they cannot support their family, insecure work, seeing the boss reward himself while refusing pay rises.

I am certain he will have unforgettable memories of witnessing people finding the courage and finding their voice to stand up to a bully.

We also understand in a deep way, they very best of Australians.

How people react under pressure if their better natures are allowed to come to the fore - looking after your mates when they are down, humour in adversity, how differences of religion, race, gender melt away when faced with the need to stand together.

The fundamental generosity and capacity of people when we aim for something better.

So I want to say this -

The trade union movement is the early warning system for this nation. We are the earthquake sensors in the ocean that feel the tremors before they reach the shores. We are the smoke alarm trying to wake you from your deepest sleep. The siren that makes you look up before it is too late.

And we are sounding the alarm now. We see the unfairness, we see the fair go being crushed with growing inequality. It is time to listen and to act.

And Australian Labor, Bill Shorten, is doing just that.

As this Chapter outlines, Labor will take action on insecure work.

Labor will take action to fix our wages system so working people get their fair share in pay rises.

Labor will take action to address the gender pay gap.

Because Labor hears working people, understands working people.

Labor will act to change the rules to bring back fairness for working people.