

Wednesday 21 March, 2018

Australians need a pay rise: ACTU's wages package

In a landmark speech today at the National Press Club ACTU Secretary Sally McManus has outlined the rules which need to change in order to ensure that Australian workers get the pay rises they desperately need.

Wages are flat-lining because people's rights at work are broken and we have a set of laws which have given too much power to employers.

Quotes attributable to Sally McManus, ACTU Secretary:

"Wages are barely keeping pace with inflation while company profits and productivity continue to rise. We need to give the power to negotiate pay rises back to working people.

"The Reserve Bank has told workers to ask for pay rises, the Treasurer thinks they should wait for them to trickle down, but we know they will only come when workers have enough power to negotiate for better pay.

Awards that improve with community standards:

"When it was established, the enterprise bargaining system was meant to cover the vast majority of workers.

"Increasingly, the system is failing and huge numbers of people are being forced onto awards which have been hollowed out and don't offer enough protection for working people against the power of big business.

"We need to change the rules so that awards provide fair pay and secure work. Unions need the right to fight for and win changes to the awards so that they keep pace with the demands of modern workers."

Penalty rates must be restored:

"The cuts to the pay of some of the lowest paid workers in Australia through the Turnbull Government's penalty rate cuts are crushing working people and pushing down consumer spending.

"The jobs which we were told would be generated by cutting penalty rates never appeared.

"Penalty rates must be restored to pre-July 2017 levels, and the law should be changed to stop business imposing any further cuts to workers pay.

A living wage:

“We were the first country to institute a living wage – not merely enough to stop people starving but enough for a family to live on.

“In the century since that decision big business has used the influence it has been given over setting the minimum wage to drive it down.

“Many countries have set the minimum wage at 60% of the median wage to ensure that no one working full time has to go without decent housing, a healthy diet, good education or any of the basic necessities of a good life.

A fair bargaining system:

“The rules for bargaining are incredibly complex and stacked against workers.

“Employers are organising their entire workforces to avoid bargaining all together by using labour hire, subsidiaries, franchises and outsourcing.

“Even when workers can bargain, the rules limit their power and protect employer’s interests above all else.

“The ‘nuclear option’ of employers simply terminating agreements has become commonplace and means that all bargaining is conducted under the threat of loss of all previously negotiated wages and conditions. This has to end.

“As a result, wages are in crisis. We need to give power back to working people to organise and win improvements to their pay and conditions in fair negotiations with their employers.

“We need to end restrictions on what can be included in a collective agreement and allow free negotiations between employers and employees.

“Workers need to be able to negotiate where the power is, whether that’s at the enterprise, industry, supply-chain, site, or project level.

“The right of all workers to withdraw their labour must be brought into line with ILO standards.

“The Fair Work Commission needs to have the power to settle long-running disputes to stop employers running out the clock on workers.

“Workers who negotiate and sign an agreement must be representative of the workforce the agreement will govern.”

Paid Family and Domestic Violence Leave:

“Family and Domestic Violence is a crisis in this country and too often the trauma of experiencing violence is compounded by the loss of a job due to lack of a leave entitlement.

“We know that people who experience family and domestic violence need a large amount of time and money to escape a violent relationship, and are currently having to use sick leave, annual leave, long service leave and unpaid leave. This is grossly unfair.

“We need to guarantee 10 days paid leave for all workers through the National Employment Standards.”

Close the gender pay gap:

“Women earn 15.3% less than men over their working lives, this has barely changed over the last 20 years.

“The gap persists through all stages of work and into retirement, when women can expect 47% less retirement savings. Many will retire in poverty.

“The laws which are meant to ensure fair and equal pay are failing women.

“We need to establish a Pay Equity Panel inside the Fair Work Commission to hear equal pay remuneration claims.

“We need to make changes to awards to address the historical under-valuation of work in female-dominated industries.

“To overcome the superannuation pay gap we need to examine ways to ensure that low income earners can accumulate superannuation and either reduce or eliminate the minimum threshold for employer contributions of \$450 per month.

ENDS

Media contact: Lachlan Williams 0447 682 027 or ACTU Media 03 9664 7315

<http://www.actu.org.au/actu-media/media-releases>