

Sunday, 9 September 2012

## The growth of insecure work is making Australian workplaces less safe, warn unions

The rise of insecure work in Australia over the past few decades has made employees less able to speak up for their rights and workplaces less safe, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said a constantly changing workforce often meant that safe systems of work were not fully-implemented, and casual, contract and labour hire workers were also less likely to speak up if they thought something was unsafe because they feared the sack.

Speaking at the annual United Mineworkers Federation Memorial Day at Cessnock, Ms Kearney said one aspect of a secure job had to be a healthy and safe workplace.

“The creeping rise of insecure work is a threat to mine safety,” Ms Kearney said. “I am talking about labour hire, casualisation and contracting out, along with fly-in/fly-out or drive-in/drive-out.

“A lasting safety culture cannot be created with a mobile, temporary workforce. And it is well known that a lack of job security makes it more difficult for people to speak up for their rights, particularly about occupational health and safety. Industry studies point to a link between a lack of safety in mines and the growth of contract employment in the industry.

“Contractors are increasingly favoured by some mining companies over permanent employees because they are cheaper and many contractors are not union-oriented and are less likely to raise safety concerns. Safety standards for some contractors have been found to be lower than other workers, as they received less training and induction.

“At the core of the CFMEU’s dispute with BHP Billiton-Mitsubishi Alliance in the Bowen Basin is management’s insistence on appointing health and safety officers who do not represent a workforce that is increasingly contract driven.”

About 40% of the Australian workforce is in insecure work. The recent inquiry chaired by former Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe heard much evidence that insecure work had led to less safe workplaces.

“The law needs to keep pace with these changes, and through the ACTU’s Secure Jobs. Better Future campaign, we intend to ensure that contract and labour hire workers have the same health and safety protections as other workers. Because one of the fundamentals of a secure job is a healthy and safe working environment.”

The United Mineworkers Federation Memorial Day has been held every year since 1996 at the Jim Comerford Memorial Wall, named after the legendary late former Northern District President of the Miners Federation.

The wall commemorates more than 1800 men and boys killed in Northern NSW mines since the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Ged Kearney’s speech is available at [www.actu.org.au](http://www.actu.org.au)*

**Media contact:**

Rebecca Tucker: ph (03) 9664 7359 or 0408 031 269; email [rtucker@actu.org.au](mailto:rtucker@actu.org.au)