

HIGHER WAGES, BETTER JOB SECURITY

Fighting for our rights at work

Our industrial relations laws are broken. Australia is experiencing record low wages, high underemployment and one of the fastest rising income inequality rates in the world. The Greens will fight to change the rules so that people have more security, higher pay and fulfilling work.



THE GREENS WILL:

- Legislate to lift the minimum wage to 60% of the median wage and to protect penalty rates
- Give workers the right to secure employment by providing a pathway for insecure workers to shift to ongoing part-time or full-time work
- Protect workers' rights by rewriting our labour laws

LEGISLATE TO LIFT THE MINIMUM WAGE AND PROTECT PENALTY RATES AND WAGES

Since the 1980s, under both Labor and Coalition governments, workplace laws have cut award conditions, kept wages down and restricted people's rights to organise. While profits soar, inequality is the highest it has been for 70 years.

Australia's current minimum wage is below the relative poverty line of 60% of the median full-time wage. One in four people in poverty work full-time¹ and since 2014, the government estimates that the number of adults on the minimum wage has increased by 25%.² This means Australia has an increasing number of people living in, or close to, relative poverty. The Greens will legislate to set the minimum wage at 60% of the median wage, enshrining in law a minimum wage that is not below the poverty line. The Fair Work Commission will phase in the increase in a responsible manner, setting timelines that take account of the diversity of Australian industry and the different needs of different sized businesses.

Penalty rates are not a luxury, they are an integral part of people's rights at work with hundreds of thousands of Australia's lowest paid workers relying on penalty rates to make ends meet.³ The Greens were the only party committed to legislating to protect penalty rates at the last election and we will continue the fight by reversing the unfair Fair Work Commission decisions and protecting penalty rates in law so they cannot be cut again.

Wage theft is rampant and unscrupulous employers continue to take advantage of workers across Australia. The systematic underpayment of hundreds of thousands of low paid employees in Australia has reached an astonishing scale. In the fast food and retail sector alone, estimates place the loss to over 250,000 employees at more than \$300 million per year.⁴

It is abundantly clear that protections aimed at preventing wage theft in Australia are insufficient. In addition to a Royal Commission to fully investigate the extent of

wage theft and below-award payment in Australia, the Greens will establish and resource a dedicated Wage Theft Unit within the Fair Work Ombudsman. \$20 million will be allocated to the unit. The Wage Theft Unit would be tasked with identifying, investigating and prosecuting cases of underpayment and wage theft.



GIVE PEOPLE THE RIGHT TO SECURE EMPLOYMENT

Job insecurity and exploitation is rife, everywhere from the gig economy to traditional employees.⁵ Many gig economy workers are not entitled to the same protections or minimum entitlements as traditional employees, such as a minimum wage, annual leave, sick leave, superannuation, insurance or unfair dismissal protection.⁶ The Greens are the first party to move to legislate to ensure gig economy workers and other people on contracts get the same legal minimum wages and conditions as traditional employees.

Everyone has the right to secure, ongoing, meaningful work if they want it. Many Australians are employed in insecure work, with no guaranteed minimum number of hours and variable income, and employers have no obligation to provide long-term job security.⁷

The Greens will legislate to give people the right to secure employment by providing a pathway for insecure workers to request their employers provide ongoing part-time or full-time work. Should an employer refuse, employees can escalate their request to the Fair Work Commission, where consideration must be given to the presumption that all employees have the right to ongoing, secure work unless there are serious countervailing business reasons relating to a business's specific needs. Unions may also make applications for secure work on behalf of particular workplaces or types of work or industries.

1 ACOSS and UNSW, Poverty in Australia 2018,, 2018, pp. 57

2 Australian Government submission to the Fair Work Commission Annual Wage Review 2015, chart 2.1

3 Senate Education and Employment Reference Committee inquiry into Penalty Rates Report, pp. 3-7

4 Sydney Morning Herald, McDonald's defends not paying weekend penalty rates and shoppies union wage deal, 26/8/17, <<https://www.smh.com.au/national/mcdonalds-defends-not-paying-weekend-penalty-rates-and-controversial-wage-deal-with-shoppies-union-20170826-gy4qh2.html>>

5 Sydney Morning Herald, High time exploitation and underpayment of workers stamped out, 2/1/17, <<https://www.smh.com.au/national/high-time-exploitation-and-underpayment-of-workers-stamped-out-20170102-gtkwdm.html>>

6 Senate Education and Employment Reference Committee inquiry into Corporate Avoidance of the Fair Work Act Report, 2017

7 Centre for Future Work, The Dimensions of Insecure Work: A Factbook, 29/05/18

PROTECT PEOPLE'S RIGHTS AT WORK BY REVIEWING OUR LABOUR LAWS

Changes to our workplace laws made under both Labor and Coalition governments have eroded people's rights at work and undermined unions. As a result, Australia has some of the most restrictive industrial action laws in the world. This has significantly reduced people's ability to protect and stand up for their rights at work and is thought to be a contributing factor to Australia's record low wage growth.⁸ Over past decades, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has repeatedly advised Australia that our workplace laws are in breach of international labour standards.⁹

The Greens support the fundamental right of people to strike and to engage in industrial action, consistent with international labour standards and not limited to artificially restricted bargaining periods. The Greens will repeal legislation banning secondary boycotts and strike action.

People should be free to collectively bargain at whatever level they consider appropriate and with whoever has real control over their work, whether at a workplace, industry or other level.

The Greens will ensure unions have stronger, enforceable rights including right of entry provisions to talk to and represent members and potential members and inspect workplaces for breaches, including occupational health and safety laws. This will mean safer workplaces for everyone.

Our current laws overwhelmingly favour employers at the cost of people. By limiting the power of people and unions to collectively organise industrial action and fight for their fundamental rights, employers have been able to get away with underpaying people, offering insecure work and, in some cases, exploitation. By protecting these fundamental rights, people and their unions will be equipped with the means necessary to fight for a fair wage and secure work.

⁸ Centre for Future Work, Historical Data on the Decline in Australian Industrial Disputes, 30/1/18

⁹ ABC, Have Australia's right to strike laws gone too far?, 21/03/17, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-21/have-the-right-to-strike-laws-gone-too-far/8370980>>