

UNION REVISIONISM CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO CREATE A DYSTOPIAN FUTURE

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Revisionism is the latest strategy of the union movement to bolster their power in workplaces and to increase union membership. The ACTU is calling for sweeping changes to the *Fair Work Act* on the false premise that Labor's *Fair Work Act* took away union rights and treated workers unfairly.

The changes that the unions are seeking include increased rights to strike, less power for the Fair Work Commission to make decisions that benefit employers, less options for employers in the bargaining process, and a raft of new entitlements for employees and unions.

The unions' attempts to re-imagine the past cannot be allowed to prevail. There is too much at stake. Their false account of history would not survive the simplest Fact Check. The facts are that Labor's *Fair Work Act* increased union power in over 100 areas and substantially boosted the entitlements of workers. When the Act was introduced it was widely criticised by employers and widely applauded by unions.

The unions now want us all to believe that giving them more power to organise strikes and to force employers to cave in to their demands is just the medicine that the community needs. Magically this will somehow create more jobs, higher wages and improved living standards for all. The arguments are breathtakingly simplistic, and obviously wrong.

The reality is that we live in a globally connected world where businesses need to remain productive, efficient and globally competitive in order to survive and grow. The success of workers is integrally connected to the success of their employers. Secure jobs and higher wages can only be offered by businesses that are successful.

We live in a world where investment is mobile. Multinational companies do not need to invest in Australia. Hundreds of factory closures over the past 20 years are proof of this. There are plenty more ageing plants in Australia that are likely to follow suit if the overseas head offices and shareholders of multinational companies decide that the business environment in Australia is no longer conducive to successful business operations.

These days, lots of people have forgotten how Australia was viewed overseas in the days when strikes were common in the 1970s and 80s. When Australia was opened up to foreign trade and investment, overseas perceptions of the operating environment in Australia became critically important to our economic success, and such perceptions remain critically important today.

The unions' proposed changes to the *Fair Work Act* would not just be bad for those established industries in which union membership remains strong in some pockets. The changes are also aimed at winding back the growth in the sharing economy – a sector where the unions have not gained any membership foothold.

So far young people have shown no interest in following unions out on strike, and this is not likely to change. Young people have the most to lose from policies that would destroy jobs and reduce the living standards of Australians.

The unions are no doubt hoping that if they repeat their assertions that the *Fair Work Act* disadvantages them enough times then people will start to believe it. This is what they have attempted to do for many years with their assertion that 40% of the workforce is in insecure work. It doesn't seem to matter to them that the ABS statistics show that the level of casual employment in Australia has been stable for the past 19 years at about 20 per cent of the workforce and that it is ridiculous to include all owners of small businesses and all independent contractors in their accounts of those in alleged insecure work.

Similarly, the unions are trying to argue that inequality is at an all time high. It does not seem to matter to them how many eminent academics disagree with them or what the official statistics say.

Changes are needed to the *Fair Work Act*, but not the ones that the unions' want. Over the past few years, two major inquiries have recommended a series of changes to the Act: the Heydon Royal Commission and the Productivity Commission Review of the Workplace Relations Framework. There are many very important recommendations made by these inquiries which deserve to be implemented without delay. These include stopping unions misusing the bargaining process to force businesses to purchase products and services at grossly inflated prices from union aligned providers, implementing a more workable Better Off Overall Test to prevent a single employee frustrating the approval of an enterprise agreement that is supported by the vast majority of employees, and redressing the transfer of business laws that are impeding business restructuring.

Union revisionism needs to be seen for what it is and rejected, including by political parties.

Political parties need to act in the community's best interests. The interests of the community are not served by the current, self-serving proposals of the unions to vary the *Fair Work Act* to give them more power.

The unions want to create a future that would be utopian for them but dystopian for the community as a whole.