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ACTU INSECURE EMPLOYMENT CAMPAIGN MISGUIDED

The ACTU on 24 October 2011 announced a national inquiry into insecure employment. Starting today submissions can be made to the so called independent inquiry.

The Institute of Public Affairs has labelled the campaign a misguided initiative. It reflects a failure to appreciate the approach to work taken by many Australians today.

The ACTU has identified 40 per cent of Australian workers as being engaged in insecure employment.

Insecure employment is seen by the ACTU as comprising at least four employment categories - independent contracting, labour hire, fixed term employment, and casual employment.

Many Australians enjoy the independence and freedom of contracting and labour hire. It affords them control over their own destiny. It allows them the opportunity to grow a business and directly benefit from their skills and knowledge. Careers are often pursued jointly with partners to maximise family and job potential.

Today there are more independent contractors than there are union members.

Casual employment can expose a worker to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. Exploitation occurs under all labour market models and labour regulations must ensure appropriate punishments apply.

On the other hand, many businesses have to deal with peaks, troughs and seasonal variations in operating conditions. The management of these changing conditions through a permanent employee workforce is often untenable. Casual employment enables a firm to cope. Also, casual employment offers thousands of young people an entry path to permanent employment.

The inquiry is timely. It is a reminder of how out of touch the ACTU and its affiliates have become. The ACTU has supported the Qantas unions in their bitter industrial campaign against Qantas. The reputation of the airline and the job security of its employees have been jeopardised by the dogged pursuit of an ideological agenda to protect full time permanent jobs on top pay and conditions.

If the intention of the inquiry is to impose more rules on the choice of employment modes then it is bound to fail. A return to the 1970s concepts of permanent full time employment security would destroy many jobs.

Australian workers today should be afforded a more enlightened approach from bodies such as the ACTU.

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