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COLES DISTRIBUTION CENTRE DISPUTE ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF BROKEN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SYSTEM

Victoria Police's apparent unwillingness to uphold and enforce a Supreme Court order for the picket line at Coles' National Distribution Centre to be lifted shows how broken the industrial relations system has become.

Researcher with the IPA Work Reform and Productivity unit, Sabine Wolff, said today that the weakness shown by Fair Work Australia in putting an end to this dispute is another example of the Fair Work system's shortcomings.

"Across Australia, but in Victoria especially, there is a sense among unions that engaging in obstructionist tactics is the way to bring about their preferred outcome in an industrial relations dispute.

"This constitutes a failure of the Fair Work industrial relations system. Fair Work Australia is thus far refusing to become involved in this dispute, claiming the blockade is not 'bargaining-related activity.'

"Toll is unable to stop the picketing at its distribution centre. Workers are being prevented from accessing their workplace.

"The idea that a picket line, designed to physically prevent people from entering their workplace, in order to force an employer to accede to union pay and conditions demands, is not an appropriate matter for Fair Work Australia to involve itself in is ludicrous," said Ms Wolff.

"The Toll workers who would simply like to return to work have been let down – by Fair Work Australia, and by Victoria Police's unwillingness to uphold a Supreme Court injunction demanding the picket line be lifted.

"Union members do have the right to strike and form picket lines. But they do not have the right to force people away from work.

"Victoria Police should enforce the law.

"These are the same tactics that the NUW used during the Baiada dispute. It is clear that they are hoping for a similar outcome – that Toll will give in to union demands as Baiada did.

"This is not the way our industrial relations system is supposed to work. Union leaders are calling for Toll to talk to the union. It seems clear by their actions that the union is not interested in undertaking a collaborative bargaining process.

"Victoria Police should step in and uphold the law by enforcing the Supreme Court order. And in the long term, we need to scrutinise the Fair Work system and ask why it appears to be contributing to increased union militancy," said Ms Wolff.

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