

**Paul Bastian**, AMWU National Secretary

## RETIRED MEMBERS' RALLY SLAMS COALITION CUTS

**A** MWU retired members have led protests by pensioners this week over the brutal impacts on vulnerable seniors and low-income families from Budget cuts by the Turnbull Government.

AMWU Retired Members' Division National Secretary Frank Cherry told the Melbourne rally that low-income families and pensioners had been condemned to living near or below the poverty line by the harsh Budgets of the Abbott and now Turnbull Governments.

He echoed concerns of the Fair Go For Pensioners (FGFP) community coalition that senior Australians risked being ignored at this election, with the freezing of Medicare rebates, \$54 billion in cuts to health and hospital services plus reviews of disability support pensions hitting the disadvantaged hardest.

FGFP President Roger Wilson said the Coalition's generous tax cuts to businesses and tax subsidies to property investors meant slashing services and hiking costs to the most vulnerable - including older people on pensions.

"Jobs and growth won't trickle down to the disadvantaged from these toxic policies," Mr Wilson told AMWU News.

Mr Wilson pleaded with the crowd to put the "Libs last this election", saying that they must "reject any government that seeks to increase the costs of doctors' visits, prescription



Fighting for a fair go - pensioners are mad as hell over harsh Coalition budget cuts: Pensioners and community rally in Melbourne.

medicines, axe dental care for families, erode disability support and cut critical aged care services".

Other community groups concerned about the Coalition's planned cuts to aged services and the housing affordability crisis also spoke at the rally.

Daisy Ellery, Chairperson of the Housing for Aged Action Group told the crowd that "the Turnbull Government doesn't care about people on low incomes, living in housing poverty" and warned both leaders to not "underestimate the power of the old persons' vote".

Mr Cherry also said that AMWU retired members agreed Coalition Ministers were out of touch with older Australians.

On a recent visit to Canberra, Liberal Ministers did not keep appointments

and instead sent their staffers in their place who were "difficult" and "had no concept of the plight of pensioners and were unable to appreciate that pensioners were living at or below the poverty line".

The ALP yesterday pledged to implement a major review of aged care funding formulas and services, including a workforce strategy to help older Australians who want employment.

But it has not promised to reverse the Coalition's \$1.2 billion cut from aged care by restricting access to complex care in nursing homes.

And Labor disappointed FGFP by agreeing to controversial pension changes to the asset test threshold which will see many better-off pensioners have their payments cut back. ■

## “WORKERS’ PARLIAMENT” PUTS LABOUR HIRE TRUTH TO POLLIES

**A**MWU members and officials have strengthened our case for tougher regulation of the labour hire industry in an intense day of meetings with MPs from across the political spectrum.

Our union had nine representatives pushing the need for strict licensing of labour hire operators and a code of behavior when we joined the first ever “Workers Parliament” delegation of unions to the Victorian State Parliament this week.

The AMWU members were among 60 unionists who on Wednesday met dozens of politicians from the Labor Government, the Liberal-National Opposition, Greens and independents to talk about the realities of life as a labour hire or casual worker.

The day of interviews came as a Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into labour hire is due to report, after evidence from unionists including AMWU members about the impact of insecure work, below-award labour rates and serious safety breaches at numerous locations.

Victorian Assistant State Secretary Craig Kelly led the AMWU delegation, which split into three to put our case to MPs for laws to implement reforms including:

- a government compliance unit to oversee compulsory licensing of all labour-hire operators
- a mandatory code of conduct for operators with an annual fee and bond payable to government
- an industry trust to protect employee benefits including leave and redundancy from theft by sham contractors and “fly-by-night” operators
- a standard contract between the labour hire firm and host employer to ensure labour hire workers are paid the same as permanent workers doing similar work.



Workers’ Parliament: the AMWU delegation before its day talking with politicians about reforms to the labour hire industry.

Mr Kelly was pleased at the access we gained to Ministers and senior MPs to drive home the message, although Liberal-National MPs declined to sign a pledge committing them to the regulatory scheme and portability of long service leave.

“It’s one thing to read a report, it’s another thing to hear the truth first-hand from experienced workers who have seen a lax, cut-throat race to the bottom among many small firms disregarding minimum standards,” he said.

“They told how insecure work affects their families, their lives.”

Mr Kelly was heartened that Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, along with Industrial Relations Minister Natalie Hutchins and most of the Labor Cabinet, took time out to address the Trades Hall delegation.

Mr Andrews committed his government to labour values and operating on a consensus basis with the State’s unions for the benefit of Victorian workers.

AMWU members described the meetings as valuable in appraising MPs of the real impact on both workers and legitimate labour hire firms and the struggle to compete with smaller, cut-throat operators which dominate the market on small projects.

“Good companies like the one I’ve worked for get illegally undercut by dodgy-brothers firms who pay below award rates and skip the travel and other allowances, so people end up getting retrenched,” said AMWU member Andrew Petkevich.

“Politicians should know it’s destroying families because there’s no job security – all companies should be properly registered, checked and regulated.” ■