

CTU media release

27 October 2009

Rest break Bill treats workers unfairly

The changes introduced by the Government today to legislation providing entitlements to workers for rest and meal breaks are unnecessary and ignore the basis of the current provisions, said CTU President Helen Kelly.

“These changes remove the absolutely fundamental right to minimum breaks at reasonably spaced periods during a working day,” said Kelly. “The current rules came into effect only this year and were designed to create rights to a break for the most vulnerable workers.”

“Workers in collective agreements and working for reasonable employers will be getting breaks,” she continued. “The whole point of this law was to ensure some minimum requirements for those in workplaces that were unorganised and where employers disregarded the need every worker has for some time to rest during a working day.”

The current provisions are extremely flexible and simply provide for two ten minute tea breaks and a half hour lunch break for the average type of normal length day. The changes proposed today will enable employers to determine whether or not a worker should have a break and then how long and when it should occur. It will also enable employers to put strict restrictions on what a worker can do in that break, even when it is unpaid. Technically it could even enable an employer to require a worker to perform some of their duties during an unpaid break period.

“This legislation removes the most basic of minimum standards which, in a country with no regulated working hours, is fundamental to workers’ wellbeing. Neither unions nor business were consulted and no notice was given that it would be introduced today in the speech John Key gave to the CTU conference only last week,” added Kelly. “It is yet another instance of this

Government pandering unnecessarily to what it thinks are employers' interests at the expense of the most vulnerable workers.”

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