



OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL SECRETARY

United Workers Union: COVID-19 Response

Tim Kennedy | 26th of March 2020

The United Workers Union was created to rebuild the power of working people. How we respond to the COVID-19 pandemic can permanently change the systems that have never worked for the 99%.

The status quo has always been unequal; this crisis has revealed it is also untenable. But moments of rupture create space and impetus for change.

UWU believes that advancing a progressive alternative vision for workers is not only the right thing to do; it is necessary. And it is urgent.

It is in this context that we present a program of actions which can ensure the power and dignity of working people is secured now and into the future.

KEY DEMANDS

We are calling on the Federal Government to intervene and play an active role in guaranteeing and providing social and economic security during this time. Market logics of profit maximisation and unequal distribution must be discarded.

ECONOMIC DEMANDS

UWU calls for an emergency economic response with three elements; *income*, *ownership* and *investment*. Our key demands include:

INCOME:

- **A Jobs Guarantee must be upheld by all employers and backed by a 100% Federal Government wage subsidy.** No worker should be dismissed or retrenched as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. This includes all workers: casuals, labour hire, freelancers, contractors and gig workers irrespective of citizenship, visa or non-visa status. Workers to resume work when needed again.

Those who have been stood down or who were not working before the crisis should receive an Income Guarantee payment of \$740.80 per week (minimum wage). An income guarantee is a periodic cash payment delivered on an individual basis rather than to a household. The payment is unconditional meaning the recipient is not required to work or demonstrate willingness to work, nor is the payment means tested. This would be paid to everyone except those covered by the Jobs Guarantee or those who have not been financially disadvantaged by the current situation.

Newstart and other Centrelink benefits should be raised to the minimum wage and mutual obligations abolished. While we welcome the Government's March 22 announcement to



double the rate of Newstart payments, we maintain that minimum wage is a more appropriate wage floor. During this time eligibility and administrative requirements should be suspended.

These income measures should continue until the end of 2020, at which time the situation can be reassessed and built upon.

- **The provisional tax-free threshold to increase from \$18,200 to \$25,000 to assist the lowest income earners in the country.**
- **A moratorium on rent and mortgage payments.** We welcome the Government's March 20 announcement to protect renters against evictions during this time and endorse public calls for a Rent Strike.

OWNERSHIP

- **Don't bailout essential sectors—buy them. Bring public goods back into public ownership.** Essential sectors that make goods or services that society universally relies upon should come under public ownership, this includes (but is not limited to) firms in the following sectors:
 - Energy
 - Health and Care
 - Early Childhood Education
 - Telecommunications
 - Transport and Logistics

Public ownership should not return to the old top-down institutions of yesterday but come with a role for workers and customers in the democratic management of such institutions.

- **Industry bailouts must comply with strict conditions of worker co-determination, ethical labour and environmental standards.**

Where it may not be appropriate to bring some firms under full public ownership, the use of public funds should come with an obligation on firms to engage in co-determination.

This means that one-third of all board positions in firms that receive a corporate bailout as part of this crisis should go to the non-managerial staff of the firm. This is a key way of making sure that public money cannot be used for share buybacks, executive pay or as a fighting fund to lower wages and conditions of employment.

UWU trusts and believes in the capacity of workers to make smart decisions and hold their employers accountable to the public interest.

INVESTMENT

- **New renewable energy generation and export infrastructure to be included as a vital component of any COVID-19 stimulus package going forward.**

Not only must the level of stimulus match the scale of the COVID-19 crisis but the direction of that funding should, alongside essential social spending, include the new energy infrastructure that the world needs. This includes large-scale renewable energy generation, upscaling battery

storage, increasing Australia's carbon sinks, and building up the capacity to export hydrogen at a significant scale.

Work on renewable energy generation and export infrastructure should begin as soon as safe and practical. This can help people return to work as quickly as possible whilst building secure, union jobs for the future.

SOCIAL DEMANDS

We also call for the following social demands to ensure the health, security and dignity of all workers:

- **A visa amnesty for migrant workers and an end to visa enforcement and detention actions by the Department of Home Affairs.**
- **Medicare access to be extended to everyone currently in Australia including visa holders and undocumented workers.**
- **Make a commitment to zero tolerance for xenophobic nationalism or attacks on migrant communities as a result of the crisis.**