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Media Release

Meat union dispute about union power, not workers

The chief executive of one of Australia's largest meat processing companies has echoed the comments of former ACTU secretary Bill Kelty, who said recently that some unions had embraced change, while others were still "protecting the 1980s".

Teys Australia CEO Brad Teys commended the many trade unions that work cooperatively with employers in a constructive way, but said some were holding the nation back.

Teys Australia is currently negotiating a new workplace agreement for its Beenleigh plant with the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU), who called a 24 hour strike last week over what they claimed was a wages dispute. However Mr Teys said the union's action was really about "holding onto its shrinking power base".

"The AMIEU is one of those archaic unions Mr Kelty was talking about, except they haven't even reached the 1980's. Their tactics show they are stuck in the Whitlam era."

He said while the union told their members that the industrial action was about "wage cuts" it was really about four "non-negotiable" demands.

These demands are the right to show a union video at prospective employees' inductions (before the worker is even employed), the right to full plant access including lunch rooms, a clause forcing the company to deduct union dues from employees' wages and clauses mandating that the company must pay contractors the same as EBA rates.

"It is despicable that they are using workers who can least afford to lose income, as pawns in their quest for greater power," Mr Teys said.

He also believes that the vote of only 28 per cent of the site's workforce should not be able to force industrial action. "Most of our staff have little interest in the union's agenda. Only around 50 workers out of 800 briefly turned up to Friday's picket line."

He stressed that Australian manufacturing - including the meat processing industry - must reform to be competitive.

"If the AMIEU was serious and wanted to negotiate in good faith, it would be working with us to find ways to reduce cost pressures, not lining up at the gate with rent-a-crowd protesters.

"It's time for this union to become part of the solution, not part of the problem."

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