

Qi Fen's Speech to Senate Inquiry into Fair Work Bill

My name is Qi Fen Huang. I am a Community Worker with Asian Women at Work. I was a sweatshop worker in the clothing industry for 4 years before this job.

Union Right of Entry is very important to migrant workers.

1. Migrant workers need Union protection.

I have witnessed the unions assisting migrants when they were treated unfairly in their work places. They said to me: they trust the union because the union represents them, they can make the boss follow the law and the workers can receive their entitlements. A clothing industry lady worked in a sweatshop for 5 years. She received \$6 an hour and worked 7 days a week. Normal day working hours were from 8am to 6pm. She had to work from 7 am to 11 pm during busy seasons. When she came to the English Class, she attended the Union's seminar about workers' rights. She understood her entitlements. She reported and exposed the boss' exploitation to the union with evidence and timesheets. She asked the union to inspect the sweatshop and brought her boss to justice. With the union's investigation, the union also found a serious hazard in the work place. In the end the company changed its name but the union still made the boss follow the law.

2. When women workers invite the union to visit their workplace they are generally underpaid, fearful and unfairly treated.

3 weeks after the union visited the workers in one furniture factory, their wages increased \$2 an hour. The workers were so happy with the result. They said that the union knew all the industry law. They are the experts in their industry. They can represent workers and negotiate with the boss.

Migrant women workers don't fully understand the current award provisions. They don't fully understand their rights in the workplace. They don't understand how the industrial relations system works in Australia. This is on top of their limited English language skills and low confidence. So they don't know how to negotiate something better, or how to negotiate to even maintain award standards in any alternative arrangement.

3. Migrant workers fear to speak out due to their lack of industry knowledge and language barriers, and lack confidence to speak out for their rights. They choke with silent fury. They choose to leave the unfair treatment in a factory rather than negotiate with the boss or supervisors.

There are 10 women working in meat wholesale shop. They work from 7:30am to 1pm without any tea break. Their supervisor said to them if they want teatime, their wages would be deducted. The women are very upset that they don't have the right to teatime. They want to have the right to go to the toilet or have a biscuit because they

feel too hungry to work from 7:30am to 1pm with a heavy workload. This story is just one of many from our work as a community worker.

If the union has the right to entry, the union could go into this workplace and do an investigation.

4. Union right of entry and union access to the workforce has three important purposes for vulnerable migrant women workers. Firstly, unions have a monitoring role to ensure employers are complying with the law. Secondly, unions have an education role, informing migrant women workers about their rights in Australia and what they should expect from their Australian workplace. Thirdly, unions have a representation role as they assist migrant women workers to speak up about concerns in the workplace and in negotiation processes around a range of issues.