



# TRANSCRIPT

## CLAIMS GUEST WORKERS SACKED FOR JOINING UNION

ACCI Chief Executive Peter Hendy on ABC TV's Lateline Program - 457 Visas - 16 October 2006

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TONY JONES: There are claims tonight that three Filipino guest workers have been sacked for joining a union and another five have been threatened with the same fate. The men claim that their dismissal has been part of a pattern of harassment by the Brisbane company which brought them to Australia eight weeks ago. At the time, they were promised more than \$40,000, but say that figure has been slashed to \$27,000 because of accommodation and other charges levied against their wages. The welders were part of a group 40 Filipinos brought to Australia under the 457 visa scheme for temporary workers. The sacked men now have just 28 days to find another job, or they'll be deported. Lateline's John Stewart reports.

JOHN STEWART: It's not your typical Saturday morning in Brisbane's western suburbs. It's 3am and eight Filipino men are busy in the kitchen, preparing their lunch and getting ready for 4 o'clock start.

ROY YABUT, FILIPINO WORKER: Breakfast and lunch, we are just taking the lunch with our lunch boxes.

JOHN STEWART: Two months after arriving in Australia to work for a Brisbane labour hire company; these Filipino welders are not happy.

VICTOR SANTOS, FILIPINO WELDER: We earn only \$400 per week in 42 hours.

JOHN STEWART: Their dream of earning \$42,000 per year has been shattered.

ROY YABUT: He said in one year you are going to earn a million pesos, that's why we came here, and we don't know the policy, that's why we feel cheated.

JOHN STEWART: The eight guest workers each pay \$175 a week to share this four-bedroom Brisbane home. So how much do you pay a week?

MARCELLO SANMARTIN, FILIPINO WELDER: 175 bucks.

JOHN STEWART: And are there eight of you in this house.

MARCELLO SANMARTIN: Yeah.

JOHN STEWART: And this is the room?

MARCELLO SANMARTIN: This is the room, that's Joe, sleeping. And that's my bed.

JOHN STEWART: So that's \$1,400 a week for this home? Do you think this home is worth \$1,400 a week?

MARCELLO SANMARTIN: I don't know.

JOHN STEWART: Today, the manager of the Brisbane-based labour hire company called Dartbridge declined to comment. But a former company manager told Lateline that the workers' house has a rental market value of about \$350 a week. And the men are also being charged a fee to cover transport to work in a minivan, health insurance costs and furniture.

MARCELLO SANMARTIN: This is my cabinet.

JOHN STEWART: The guest workers earn \$21 an hour, regardless of when they work, day or night, weekday or weekends. They receive no sick leave and can be sacked with one day's notice. The welders claim Dartbridge has repeatedly threatened to deport them for not working fast enough.

MARCELLO SANMARTIN: They told me if you don't get your men settled as good workers, I can send you back home immediately.

JOHN STEWART: Today, the threats of being sacked became a reality. Three of the welders had their contracts terminated and five others have been told to resign or they will lose their visas. Roy Yabut says he was told by Dartbridge that he was sacked because the company had too many workers.

ROY YABUT, FILIPINO WORKER: I think they want us to be example, because we are 40 Filipinos working in our company and they want to sack us first so the other people afraid of doing something, but I think joining the union in Australia is legal so that's what we do.

JOHN STEWART: Unions say the 457 guest worker visa system is open to abuse and many workers are being exploited by new labour hire companies.

DOUG CAMERON, AUSTRALIAN MANUFACTURING WORKERS' UNION: Three of these workers have been sacked today, we believe it was because they contacted the union to try and move their conditions to achieve reasonable standards and they were sacked because they joined the union.

JOHN STEWART: Shortly after the ABC arrived, the men started receiving calls from their wives in the Philippines, who told them they would be sacked if they joined the union.

JUN RAMIREZ, FILIPINO WELDER: The agency in the Philippines called my wife she called me.

JOHN STEWART: The ABC has only been here for two hours and the company is calling your wife in the Philippines.

JUN RAMIREZ: Yes, she is very nervous and told me not to join the union, she said don't join because you have four people, four people, you have four children. Yes. We earn only \$400 per week in 42 hours.

JOHN STEWART: Each of the Filipino workers owes \$3,000 to a migration agent in the Philippines, which blows out to \$4,800 when interest is added. The welders have been told if they want to stay in Australia, they must return to the Philippines and pay another placement.

WORKER #4: After one year obligation to go back to the Philippines, we pay another 105,000 pesos.

JOHN STEWART: But employer groups defend the benefits of the 457 visa scheme, saying it has brought skilled workers to the Australian economy.

PETER HENDY, AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY: We think it's a sensible, viable alternative to getting skilled labour. If you can't get Australians, you should look at bringing people in from overseas, but of course it's up to every business - there is a scare campaign going around about the 457 visas and the general skilled migration program. That's contemptible. They're running a political scare campaign because they don't like

WorkChoices.

JOHN STEWART: The union has promised to find the three sacked men jobs and is seeking legal advice for the other five whose jobs are under threat. But the clock is ticking for Roy Yabut and his workmates and if they don't find jobs within four weeks they'll be forced to return home. John Stewart, Lateline.