

## **SAY NO TO THE RETURN OF WORKCHOICES**

The Howard government introduced Workchoices.

The Rudd government abolished Workchoices.

The Liberal/National Party Coalition, led by Tony Abbott, wants to bring back parts of Workchoices.

Under Workchoices workers lost many key rights and entitlements.

Under Workchoices protection from unfair dismissal was removed for many workers.

Individual contracts which cut wages, penalty rates, loadings and allowances, were made legal.

It is not in the interests of workers for us to go back to a Workchoices system.

The attached fact sheet shows where Tony Abbott stands on this issue.



## The facts

you should know  
about **Tony Abbott**  
& WorkChoices

# WorkChoices: Fact Sheet

## WorkChoices hurt Australian workers and their families.

- X Under WorkChoices protection from being sacked unfairly was stripped away from more than four million workers.
- X Under WorkChoices it was easier for employers to cut penalty rates, overtime pay, holiday loadings, public holidays, redundancy pay and work allowances.
- X Under WorkChoices more than a million low paid workers suffered real pay cuts of up to \$90 a week from WorkChoices' changes to minimum wages.
- X Under WorkChoices AWA individual contracts only needed to contain 5 minimum conditions.
- X Office of the Employment Advocate figures in 2006 confirmed AWAs were a rip-off for working people, taking away basic conditions without any compensation:
  - 64 per cent cut annual leave loading;
  - 63 per cent cut penalty rates;
  - 52 per cent cut shift work loadings;
  - 51 per cent cut overtime loadings;
  - 48 per cent cut monetary allowances;
  - 46 per cent cut public holiday pay;
  - 40 per cent cut rest breaks;
  - 36 per cent cut declared public holidays; and
  - 22 per cent provided workers with no pay rise, some for up to 5 years.
- X Under WorkChoices, awards were set to disappear forever:
  - Award content got stripped out and awards couldn't be updated.
  - Once you made an AWA or an agreement, the award never applied to you again.
  - New businesses weren't even covered by awards – their employees only got five minimum conditions.
- X Under WorkChoices young workers, women and casuals were the most vulnerable, and ended up being its worst victims.

# Tony Abbott and WorkChoices

Despite Australian families rejecting WorkChoices at the last election Mr Abbott has consistently defended WorkChoices and has said that he would bring back some of the worst elements of WorkChoices.

Below are some of Mr Abbott's comments which show how out of touch he is with Australian families.

1. Abbott says WorkChoices was good for wages, jobs and workers.
2. Abbott believes aspects of WorkChoices should be reinstated.
3. Abbott says WorkChoices was one of the Howard Government's greatest achievements.
4. Abbott claims that WorkChoices didn't cost the Coalition the last election.
5. Abbott claims WorkChoices was good because it was improved.
6. Abbott only rules out not using the phrase WorkChoices.
7. Abbott claims that getting rid of WorkChoices hurt jobs.
8. Abbott refuses to rule out revisiting WorkChoices.
9. Abbott defends WorkChoices.
10. Abbott claims WorkChoices would have been good during the Global Financial Crisis.
11. Abbott was opposed to any changes to WorkChoices because he thought it couldn't be improved.
12. Abbott has always supported extreme workplace laws like WorkChoices.
13. Abbott says WorkChoices will improve our standard of living.
14. Abbott claims WorkChoices was economically advantageous.
15. Abbott admits that workplace protections were lost under WorkChoices.
16. Abbott says WorkChoices was a political mistake, not an economic mistake.
17. Abbott calls for workplace laws to be revisited.
18. Abbott refuses to rule out changing industrial laws back.
19. Abbott says ending AWAs was a great leap backwards.
20. Abbott makes excuses for bad bosses.
21. Abbott says workers under pressure at work should just get another job.
22. Abbott has said he will get rid of unfair dismissal laws that protect workers in small businesses.
23. Abbott refuses to rule out bringing back individual work contracts.
24. Abbott claimed to be the principal draftsman of John Hewson's Fightback policy in 1993 which also proposed individual work contracts and cutting the Youth Wage to just \$3 per hour.

**TURN OVERLEAF** FOR MORE INFORMATION ON EACH OF THESE

**1. Abbott says WorkChoices was good for wages, jobs and workers.**

“The Howard Government’s industrial legislation, it was good for wages, it was good for jobs, and it was good for workers. And let’s never forget that.”

*SOURCE: PARLIAMENT HOUSE INTERVIEW, 19 MARCH 2008*

**2. Abbott believes aspects of WorkChoices should be reinstated.**

EXTRACT FROM AAP ARTICLE:

WorkChoices not dead yet, says Abbott.

While new Liberal leader Tony Abbott has maintained “the phrase WorkChoices” was dead, he also believed aspects of the old legislation should be reinstated.

*SOURCE: AAP, 14 DECEMBER 2009*

**3. Abbott says WorkChoices was one of the Howard Government’s greatest achievements.**

“Let me begin my contribution to this debate by reminding members that workplace reform was one of the greatest achievements of the Howard government.”

*SOURCE HOUSE OF REPS, HANSARD, 13 AUGUST 2009*

**4. Abbott claims that WorkChoices didn’t cost the Coalition the last election.**

“Let me say WorkChoices did not cost the former government the election.”

*SOURCE: HOUSE OF REPS, HANSARD, 13 AUGUST 2009*

**5. Abbott claims WorkChoices was good because it was improved.**

“Now, it’s true, Bev, that we went a little too far with that Bill whose name I will no longer even mention. We did correct that, though, when we brought back, in effect, the no disadvantage test.”

*SOURCE: ABBOTT – ABC MELBOURNE, 2 DECEMBER 2009*

**6. Abbott only rules out not using the phrase WorkChoices.**

**JOURNALIST:** “Just recently, when your book came out, you were flirting with, not flirting, but you weren’t ruling out re-embracing WorkChoices. Is that still part of your manifesto now?”

**ABBOTT:** “Well, the phrase WorkChoices is dead. No-one will ever mention it again, but look, we have to have a free and flexible economy.”

*SOURCE: PRESS CONFERENCE, 1 DECEMBER 2009*

**7. Abbott claims that getting rid of WorkChoices hurt jobs.**

“I certainly think that unemployment is heading up and one of the things which is most concerning about this Government, is that two of its signature policies, the workplace changes and the ETS, are obviously going to have a detrimental effect on jobs”

*SOURCE: PARLIAMENT HOUSE INTERVIEW, 2 FEBRUARY 2009*

**8. Abbott refuses to rule out revisiting WorkChoices.**

**O'BRIEN:** “So you do want to revisit WorkChoices?”

**ABBOTT:** “Well, if we are going to have productive workplaces, we can never bring down the curtain on workplace reform...I think people will be readier for reform from us then than they were at the last election.”

*SOURCE: 7.30 REPORT, 27 JULY 2009*

**9. Abbott defends WorkChoices.**

“WorkChoices wasn’t all bad”

*SOURCE: BATTLELINES, 2009, PAGE 87*

**10. Abbott claims WorkChoices would have been good during the Global Financial Crisis.**

“My instinct is that Australians who were dismayed by the seeming harshness of the original WorkChoices legislation could be much less sentimental about ‘hard-won conditions’ when businesses are struggling to survive and jobs are disappearing... After three decades of economic change, reform had almost become a dirty word, but tougher times will make the case for reform more, not less, persuasive.”

*SOURCE: BATTLELINES, 2009, PAGE 155*

**11. Abbott was opposed to any changes to WorkChoices because he thought it couldn't be improved.**

"The new government has its mandate and the new opposition has its mandate and I think we should vote for things that we think are good policy and against things that we think are bad policy. It's our judgement."

"I don't think there's anything that they are likely to propose to the existing Workplace Relations Act that would improve it. So I think whatever they put up we should vote against it."

*SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN FINANCIAL REVIEW, 28 NOVEMBER 2007*

**12. Abbott has always supported extreme workplace laws like WorkChoices.**

"One of the most important Howard Government policies has been the introduction of Australian Workplace Agreements..."

*SOURCE: TONY ABBOTT, SPEECH TO HR NICHOLLS SOCIETY CONFERENCE, 2001*

**13. Abbott says WorkChoices will improve our standard of living.**

"WorkChoices will also help continue the improvement in our living standards and quality of life. And that's something worth waiting for."

*SOURCE: TONY ABBOTT- NEWSLETTER, NOVEMBER 2005*

**14. Abbott claims WorkChoices was economically advantageous.**

"There was a further round of workplace relations reform, which was a political mistake, but let us be under no illusions: it was economically advantageous."

*SOURCE: HOUSE OF REPS, HANSARD, 9 SEPTEMBER 2009*

**15. Abbott admits that workplace protections were lost under WorkChoices.**

"I accept that certain protections, in inverted commas, are not what they were. That whole raft of regulation expressed in awards that sometimes ran into hundreds, even thousands of pages, I accept that that has largely gone. I accept that."

*SOURCE: ELECTORATE FUNCTION, 13 NOVEMBER 2007*

**16. Abbott says WorkChoices was a political mistake, not an economic mistake.**

“WorkChoices was a political mistake, but it may not have been an economic one.”

*SOURCE: BATTLELINES, 2009, PAGE 87*

**17. Abbott calls for workplace laws to be revisited.**

EXTRACT FROM SYDNEY MORNING HERALD ARTICLE:  
The coalition will need to revisit workplace relations laws for the next election with higher unemployment likely to make voters more receptive, opposition frontbencher Tony Abbott says.

*SOURCE: SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 27 JULY 2009*

**18. Abbott refuses to rule out changing industrial laws back.**

EXTRACT FROM SYDNEY MORNING HERALD ARTICLE:  
New federal Liberal leader Tony Abbott has not ruled out changes to Australia’s industrial relations landscape if he wins power next election. When asked if new Liberal policy would include seeking to re-introduce aspects of the previous Howard government’s WorkChoices regime, which had been rolled back by the Kevin Rudd government, Mr Abbott said Australia needed a “free and flexible economy.”

*SOURCE: SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 1 DECEMBER 2009*

**19. Abbott says ending AWAs was a great leap backwards.**

EXTRACT FROM THE AUSTRALIAN ARTICLE:  
**HEADLINE:** End of AWA’s a ‘great leap backwards’

*SOURCE: THE AUSTRALIAN, 14 SEPTEMBER 2009*

**20. Abbott makes excuses for bad bosses.**

“If we’re honest, most of us would accept that a bad boss is a little bit like a bad father or a bad husband – notwithstanding all of his faults, you find that he tends to do more good than harm. He might be a bad boss but at least he’s employing someone while he is in fact a boss.”

*SOURCE: PM PROGRAM, ABC RADIO, 1 JULY 2002*



**21. Abbott says workers under pressure at work should just get another job.**

“The best protection for the worker who feels he or she might be under pressure at his job is the chance of another job. The chance of a better job. That is the best protection. Not going off to some judge or industrial commission that won’t order your employer, who you don’t like and he doesn’t like you, to keep you in an unhappy partnership forever.”

*SOURCE: PM PROGRAM, ABC RADIO, 16 NOVEMBER 2007*

**22. Abbott has said he will get rid of unfair dismissal laws that protect workers in small businesses.**

“You know, at four elections running we had a mandate to take the unfair dismissal monkey off the back of small business and we will once more seek that mandate.”

*SOURCE: SPEECH, QUEENSLAND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, FEBRUARY 2010*

**23. Abbott refuses to rule out bringing back individual work contracts.**

“So WorkChoices is well and truly dead but there are some aspects, many aspects of the Howard government policies, until WorkChoices went too far, that we do need to keep.”

*SOURCE: AAP, 14 DECEMBER 2009*

**24. Abbott claimed to be the principal draftsman of John Hewson’s Fightback policy in 1993 which also proposed individual work contracts and cutting the Youth Wage to just \$3 per hour.**

“He [John Hewson] asked me to be the principal draftsman of the main Fightback document.”

*SOURCE: BATTLELINES, 2009, PAGE 18*

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