

November 15: half a million rally against Howard's IR laws

Union defiance against Howard's repressive IR laws began on November 15 when 600,000 people nationwide took to the streets to protest against the changes. ACTU secretary, Greg Combet, said union members and their leaders would refuse to pay fines for illegal industrial activity "As a union leader let me make this clear, I will not pay a \$33,000 fine for asking for people to be treated fairly, I will be asking other union leaders to do the same."



Retired against IR reforms

"Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW Inc (CPSA) stands with the trade unions in opposition to the Australian Government's proposed industrial relations changes" said Morrie Mifsud, CPSA State President.

"Howard told us nothing about these proposals before the election last year. He lied by omission and now he claims a mandate to destroy working conditions. Many of our members and constituents we serve campaigned long and hard to get decent conditions in their industries. They are not going to stand idly by while Howard tries to wreck our living standards.

"Not only does the Australian Government want to abolish basic working conditions, they also intend removing the power of the Industrial Relations Commission to set the minimum wage. This is not only bad for paid workers; it is also detrimental to pensioners. The pension in Australia is calculated against Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) at 25 percent. If MTAWE goes down so will pensions. This will mean pensioners will have even more difficulty paying skyrocketing bills for essentials such as food, housing, transport and health services. And how are people going save up enough in superannuation to afford a decent retirement?

"The proposed industrial relations changes are unjust, regressive will guarantee greater inequality and poverty for years to come. CPSA supports a concerted effort to make this legislation dead in the water" said Mr Mifsud.

Workplace plans a sham

A prominent free-market economist has attacked the Federal Government's plan to scrap unfair dismissal laws for employers with fewer than 100 workers as pork-barrelling.

"What is all this about?" asked Mark Wooden after presenting a paper that criticised every plank of the Government's planned industrial relations changes to an economics conference in Melbourne.

"It must be pork-barrelling or it is just acquiescence to some employer interest. There is no economic sense in it," he said.

Professor Wooden said that by stripping the awards while promoting individual agreements the Government was reducing the choices workers had to determine how they were employed. "If the aim is to provide employees with real choices, then I am on Greg Combet's side - the right to bargain collectively needs to be protected," he said.

He also questioned the creation of a fair pay commission to take over power to set minimum wages from the Industrial Relations Commission, saying the Federal Government was the most appropriate body to set wages in conjunction with tax and welfare policies.

"The only people here who can turn the right levers are the Government, not some third party, no matter what you call it."

Join the Blue Mountains Unions Council

BMUC Secretary

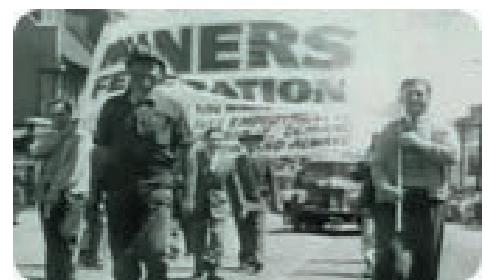
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Oliver Twist clause: don't ask for more

Under the Government's proposed laws, union officials and employees will be fined up to \$33,000 simply for asking an employer to include in an enterprise agreement provision for:

- Protection from unfair dismissal
- Union involvement in dispute resolution
- Allowing employees to attend trade union training
- Committing the employer to future collective bargaining
- Protecting job security in the event that people are replaced by labour hire or contractors
- Any other claim the Minister decides should be illegal.

That's \$33,000 for each and any of these 'offences'.

New laws not Australian way

Border Mail Mon, Nov 07, 2005

The proposed new industrial relations laws and the proposed anti-terrorism laws are both against the spirit of the Australian way of life, therefore they must both be unconstitutional in other words illegal.

The arrogance of making our Melbourne Cup day the day on which we would lose our freedoms and civil liberties is beyond all understanding for an Australian prime minister to do.

A referendum on these vital issues is the least the Governor Maj-Gen, Michael Jeffery, should demand.

Letters to the editor, Albury



Bishop opposes IR legislation

"The Government should withdraw the legislation and consult more widely," Philip Huggins, the Anglican bishop of Melbourne's northern region, told the Senate's workplace relations committee. The bishop, who has a background in economics, said the onus of proof was on the Government, which had had months to prove its case.

He said the present system was stable and had evolved over time on sound ethical principles.

"Our many honourable employers don't need a return to 19th-century class warfare - the kind that led to trade unions. Nor do our very many good employers need to be unfairly stigmatised by divisive legislation," he said. He also criticised the Government's haste, asking: "Is this the way a healthy democracy should function?"

Bishop Huggins said the theological starting point was the dignity of humankind and of work, and people should not be reduced to servants of an economic philosophy. He said issues of work stress "appear only to be worsened by ... this bill".



"Unhappy workers can go elsewhere"

Workers who were unable to renegotiate employment contracts with their bosses could look for another job, says Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews. Asked what would happen if the employer wanted to scrap an agreement, he said: "Well, the worker in that situation has got the choice of renegotiating a new agreement or choosing to go elsewhere."

He also said new employees who were offered agreements that slashed previously accepted award conditions could choose "refuse to take the job".

Salvation Army: IR laws hit vulnerable

The proposed IR legislation gives the unemployed an opportunity to make themselves more attractive to an employer by committing themselves to an AWA that allows them to work 38 hours a week with no public holidays or week end loading. This allows the employer to reduce costs. However it exploits the vulnerable at the expense of the family minded employee who is not willing to trade these valuable days away without a significant financial benefit to the family.

As there are only 100,000 jobs on offer in Australia at the moment and officially 500,000 people looking for work (plus 800,000 on disability or child care pensions) there will be many people who will find these conditions attractive, even in these buoyant economic times; imagine what will happen when the unemployment situation gets worse.

For this reason the end result of these changes could be the moving of employment from those unwilling to sacrifice important time with their families to the desperate or those without family responsibilities. This is not a good move.

Reducing unemployment

“I have worked one hour so far this week. According to government statistics I am no longer unemployed. No wonder the unemployment rate is so low.”
Sydney Morning Herald letters 13-10-2005



Bob Hawke: IR laws a monstrous trick

Former Prime Minister Bob Hawke has delivered a stinging rebuke of the Federal Government's industrial relations changes.

In the annual Lionel Murphy lecture in Sydney, Mr Hawke said the workplace changes were an attempt to destroy the arbitration system and the trade union movement.

“It is wrong. It is unfair. It is un-Australian. It is immoral,” he said.

He says the laws will allow employers to use individual workplace agreements to cut workers' pay and conditions, such as public holidays, penalties and meal breaks.

And he took issue with the proposed Fair Pay Commission.

“This is simply a monstrous trick on the least privileged workers in our society,” he said.

Ross Gittins: WorkChoices' class war

Sydney Morning Herald 21/11/2005

Whenever anyone says the rich don't pay enough tax or wants to cut back his generous grants to top private schools, John Howard always accuses them of trying to take us back to the bad old, long-gone days of class conflict.

But his own industrial relations changes are an undisguised assault on the Liberal Party's traditional class enemies: the unions, unionised workers and workers generally.

By hitting so hard at the long-hated union movement, Mr Howard is also striking a blow against his political opponents of the past 30 years, the Labor Party. This consequence has escaped many people; you can be sure it hasn't escaped the most successful - and thus most carefully calculating - politician of his generation.

Archbishop condemns Howard IR laws

John Howard's industrial relations reforms had fuelled community fears that the civilised standards of democratic society were being further eroded, Melbourne Anglican Archbishop Peter Watson said. Archbishop Watson told his diocesan synod that the "corporate model which judges success by the criteria of the balance sheet short-changes us, as if that is all that matters. Civilised society is not an extension of the corporate world.

The corporate world should exist to serve the interest and wellbeing of a caring society."

"Weekends and leisure time are not optional extras. They must be preserved for the wellbeing of individuals, families and the whole community and, ultimately, for the health of the economy." said Archbishop Watson.

Peter Lewis, editor Workers Online

It was poetic really, the WorkChoices legislation, all 1,000 plus pages of it, introduced into Federal Parliament this week under the cloak of terror.

No sooner had the legislation lobbed than the PM was diverting the media with talk of an imminent terror attack; and all eyes went straight to the birdie. At least we have the political dynamic of the next 18 months in stark relief. The Howard Government will use everything in its power to shift the focus to national security to divert attention from these nasty, extremist, ideologically driven laws.

How else can we describe a set of laws drafted by corporate laws that, in the name of deregulation, set out to criminalise industrial activity, give the government unprecedented power to impose its will on individual workplaces and strip the long-held rights of Australian workers.



Key Facts: Workplace Relations laws

"This legislation tears up 100 years of the social contract in Australia. Since Federation our industrial relations system has been built on the idea that ordinary hard-working Australians got to participate in the benefits of economic growth, and that there were protections there for people when times got tough. This is the system that the Federal Government's laws will attack." Greg Combet, Secretary, ACTU

Key Facts:

1. Unfair dismissal - rights will be taken away from 3.7 million Australian workers who will be able to be sacked unfairly and with no reason given.
2. Individual contracts - the Government wants to see more and more people pushed on to individual contracts. Under these laws there is no legal requirement for these contracts to protect people's take-home pay or to include important Australian workplace conditions like overtime pay, penalty rates, public holiday pay, meal breaks, redundancy pay etc.
3. Awards - Award conditions will not be guaranteed or 'protected by law'. In fact, what these laws will mean is that the award safety net is effectively gone.
4. Minimum wages - Minimum wages will no longer be set by the Industrial Relations Commission - that role will be given to a board appointed by a Government that has consistently said that minimum wages in Australia are too high.
5. Unions - The right of unions to visit workplaces will be restricted and unions can be hit with fines of \$33,000 if they even ask for workers to be protected

Penalties Frozen on Sundaes

A 15-year-old ice cream parlour worker had her shifts taken away for refusing to sign an AWA that lowered her wage and took away penalty rates.

Year 9 student Isobella Buda told by a manager at Manly's Gelatissimo in August that she had "decided" she was not working there any more by not signing an AWA.

The AWA took away Saturday loading and Sunday rates and replaced them with an hourly rate \$0.36 less than the award's ordinary rate, leaving her more than \$40 a week worse off.