



Government's proposed IR legislation must go further to deliver 'rights at work', say unions

Labor's proposed industrial relations legislation fails to fully deliver on the Rudd Government's pre-election promise to scrap WorkChoices and restore workers' rights, says the ACTU.

Releasing the ACTU's submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Fair Work Bill today, ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said the legislation was a major step forward after a decade of attacks on workers rights, but needed amendments to several key deficiencies.

Mr Lawrence also challenged the Liberal and National Parties to end the word games and state once and for all whether they will support these reforms in the Senate, or remain tied to WorkChoices.

"The single most important factor in the election of the Rudd Government was its promise to get rid of WorkChoices," Mr Lawrence said. "Now is the crunch time for the Labor Party to fully deliver on this promise.

"There are several important flaws in the Government's proposed legislation where the Bill falls short of what Australians expected when they voted to reject WorkChoices. Working Australians who voted for change at the last election will be very disappointed if these flaws are not corrected by the Senate."

The most glaring broken election promise concerns the limit on what workers and employers can bargain about and include in a workplace agreement. The Bill prevents workers from bargaining for better unfair dismissal protections and for improved access to advice and assistance from unions in their workplace.

"It is vital to prevent workers being exploited or discriminated against that unions can enter workplaces and are able to inspect pay and personnel records," Mr Lawrence said. "Equally, workers must have access to timely advice and support from unions.

"Unless changed, the legislation will make it unlawful for an employer and a union to agree to reduce the qualifying period before employees are entitled to be protected from unfair dismissal."

The ACTU's submission also calls for the scope for multi-employer bargaining to be broadened to be consistent with international labour standards.

Workers, represented by unions, should be able to bargain with a group of employers without restriction, Mr Lawrence said.

"Along with adopting the improvements in the ACTU submission, the Government must resist the misleading and deceptive campaign being waged by a number of the employer groups," he said.

"These groups were in the cheer squad for WorkChoices. They were apologists for the exploitation and rip-offs of vulnerable workers that became rampant under the Howard-Costello IR laws.

"Especially in the current difficult economic environment, it is essential that the Senate pass these new IR reforms, as amended, so that workers' rights are restored and the jobs and incomes of employees are safeguarded," Mr Lawrence said.

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