

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, 2 September 2005

Exploitation of most vulnerable people likely if IR changes proceed

A leading non-government employer today expressed concern about the effects of the Federal Government's proposed industrial relations changes on the lowest paid workers.

UnitingCare NSW.ACT, which employs 6,000 staff, said it holds serious reservations about the Federal Government's foreshadowed proposals and their endorsement by industry lobby group, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI).

Rev Harry Herbert, Executive Secretary of UnitingCare NSW.ACT, said a recent presentation by ACCI had failed to convince seven senior church representatives, including the Moderator of the Uniting Church's NSW Synod, that the government is committed to protecting the interests of low income workers.

'While we need to await specific details of the legislation, the Federal Government's advertising campaign has already highlighted sufficient information to give us concerns.

'As both a large employer and an advocate for human rights and human dignity we believe the draft proposals do not sufficiently consider the needs of low income people and the most vulnerable in our community.'

Mr Herbert said the main concerns of UnitingCare NSW.ACT are:

- The abolition of the 'no disadvantage' test for AWA's. This could lead to considerable exploitation of low income workers, particularly by unscrupulous employers.
- An assumption that what is best for employers will be best for employees. We believe that the changes put forward by the Government and supported by ACCI require negotiation with workers, unions and other employers and not just explanation.

- The future of the award system. We are concerned that individual contracts will replace awards and because of the power imbalance between employees and employers, low paid workers will be disadvantaged.
- We support the reduction of unemployment, but not at the cost of reducing the basic wage and conditions of the lowest paid workers. The manner in which the Fair Pay Commission will be established and its operating instructions are of concern.
- We do not believe that unions should have unrestricted access to the workplace, nor do we agree with ACCI's view that they should have no access to the workplace for purposes of provide information and advice to workers.
- The proposal that employers with less than 100 workers be exempted from unfair dismissal provisions. 'While we are aware of abuses of the current unfair dismissal laws, we are also aware of many cases where workers have not received justice. The Government's alternatives for people seeking redress to injustice are no substitute,' Mr Herbert said.

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