

CAMPAIGN BRIEF

300,000 workers say No to WorkChoices in WA!

Troy Buswell and the State Government are undertaking a review of Western Australian workplace laws and will soon announce changes that could affect up to 300,000 Western Australian workers.

Former Howard Government industrial relations advocate Steven Amendola was appointed by Mr Buswell to head the review, which is due to report to government later this year.

Under the terms of reference announce by Mr Buswell, Mr Amendola has been asked to specifically identify areas of legislative reform in areas including:

- Individual versus collective agreements;
- The award safety net;
- Minimum wages;
- Statutory minimum conditions of employment; and
- Unfair dismissal.

In announcing the review, Mr Buswell identified that up to 30 per cent of WA employees were covered by the State system, mostly in unincorporated small business and in the State's public sector. With the Western Australian workforce consisting of just over 1 million people, more than 300,000 people could be affected by changes to Western Australia's workplace laws.

WHAT WILL THE STATE GOVERNMENT DO?

While the announcement of the Amendola Review reveals the Barnett Government intends to introduce changes to Western Australia's workplace laws, the government has said little to indicate what these changes will be. However, the previous actions of Liberal Governments and previous statements by both Mr Buswell and Premier Colin Barnett provide some insight.

In the 1990's, Mr Barnett was a senior Minister in the Court Government when it introduced three waves of industrial relations changes that saw individual contracts introduced and minimum standards cut for many Western Australian workers. Research conducted by the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training into the effects of the Court Government's Individual Workplace Agreements (IWA's) found that:

- 74 per cent of agreements provided no weekend penalty rates;
- 67 per cent of agreements provided no overtime rates of pay;
- 56 per cent of agreements provided an ordinary rate of pay below the award rate;
- 49 per cent of full-time, part-time and fixed term agreements absorbed annual leave into the ordinary hourly rate of pay; and
- 75 per cent of the agreements analysed were without a pay increase provision.

The Court Government's IWA's were abolished following the election of the Gallop Labor Government in 2001. In a speech to the Parliament in October 2007, Mr Barnett said that the Gallop Government was foolish to have done this.

The Howard Government's WorkChoices changes closely mirrored the changes introduced by the Court Government and saw individual contracts implemented in Australian workplaces. WorkChoices saw the award safety net abolished and minimum standards eroded for many Australian workers.

While then in Opposition, key figures in the current State Government publicly supported the Howard Government WorkChoices changes, with Colin Barnett telling the Parliament in October 2007 that he, "agreed with the broad philosophy of the WorkChoices system," and Troy Buswell telling the Parliament at the same time that he, "supported the retention of individual workplace agreements."

With Mr Barnett and Mr Buswell now in government, and a former Howard Government industrial relations advocate reviewing the Western Australia's industrial relations system, there is a real danger that Mr Buswell and Mr Barnett will implement WorkChoices style changes in Western Australia that will see minimum standards cut for up to 300,000 Western Australian workers.

IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT SERVICES

More than 120,000 of the workers likely to be affected by any changes to Western Australian workplace laws will be people employed in the public sector. This will include people delivering important public services, such as health, education, policing and child protection. It will also include people employed to protect our environment and monitor safety on our mine sites and in other workplaces.

If the State Government introduces changes to our workplace laws that cut minimum standards, it will become more difficult to attract and retain people in our public sector, particularly as we enter a new Gorgon-led boom, and the quality of important public services will deteriorate as a result. This deterioration in public services will be particularly harsh, coming on top of budget cuts already announced by Mr Buswell, which require government

departments to arbitrarily cut 3 per cent of expenditure this year, irrespective of the services they deliver.

WHAT WE ARE CAMPAIGNING FOR

UnionsWA will run the *No WorkChoices in WA* campaign until the State Government guarantees that it will:

- Not introduce WorkChoices style individual contracts in Western Australia;
- Not erode minimum standards or the award safety net system in Western Australian workplaces;
- Maintain the role of the WA Industrial Relations Commission as the independent umpire;
- Maintain protections against unfair dismissal; and
- Maintain and improve public services in WA.

More information about the campaign could be found at www.noworkchoicesinwa.com.

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