

Workers stand to lose \$\$\$ under Liberal plan to scrap penalty rates and bring back WorkChoices

Tony Abbott and the Liberal Party will scrap penalty rates and unfair dismissal protection and reintroduce individual contracts for Australian workers if they are elected later this year, say unions.

In the latest sign of the Liberals' deceptive plan to reintroduce WorkChoices, deputy Opposition leader Julie Bishop has confirmed penalty rates would be targeted by a Liberal Government.

Ms Bishop told ABC radio in Melbourne:

"Bringing back inflexible working conditions such as the penalty rates regime is costing employers more, it is making workers worse off." (ABC Radio 774, 15 February 2010)

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said the wages and conditions of millions of Australian workers would be under attack if the Liberals were elected. She said scrapping penalty rates alone would severely hurt the living standards of hundreds of thousands of working families.

For example, a typical young part-time hospitality employee working two four-hour shifts during weekdays and one eight-hour Sunday shift would lose almost \$90 a week if penalty rates were abolished.

"Penalty rates are paid to people who work unsocial hours at weekends or nights, away from their family and friends," Ms Burrow said.

"They are essential to workers' take home pay and many families depend on penalty rates to maintain their standard of living. Penalty rates have been in existence in many industries for decades and taking them away would simply be unworkable for businesses and employees alike.

"Julie Bishop, the second most senior Liberal, has revealed the Liberals have a plan to get rid of the rights and protections in the award safety net - all in the name of 'flexibility' for employers.

"This is a return to WorkChoices pure and simple, no matter what the Liberals call it."

Ms Burrow said Tony Abbott, a former Workplace Minister in the Howard Government, had also confirmed the Liberals plan to eliminate protection from unfair dismissal for millions of small business employees, and to reintroduce WorkChoices-style AWAs.

Mr Abbott told a Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland function last week:

"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. At four elections running we had a mandate to introduce statutory non-union contracts and we will seek to renew that mandate."

"Tony Abbott and Julie Bishop have let the cat out of the bag that the Liberals will reintroduce WorkChoices if elected," Ms Burrow said.

"Of course, they will try to disguise it as something else, but voters know what they are up to. More than 50% of people polled by the ACTU believe the Liberals would bring back WorkChoices if given the chance. Working Australians and their families are still recovering from the Global Financial Crisis and can't afford to risk a return to WorkChoices under the Liberals."

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