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Abbott's paid parental leave proposal is a dishonest smokescreen for WorkChoices

Liberal leader Tony Abbott's paid maternity leave proposal is a dishonest smokescreen for the reintroduction of WorkChoices, say unions.

Mr Abbott's proposal for big business to fund a six months paid parental leave scheme is a disgraceful attempt to deceive working families given his track record as a hardline opponent of helping working mothers and supporter of WorkChoices, say unions.

"It is a pie in the sky scheme that Mr Abbott knows has no chance of ever being implemented," ACTU President Sharan Burrow said.

"It is an attempt to distract people from his plan to bring back WorkChoices which would have disastrous effects on working women and lead to a widening of the gender pay gap."

She said that when it came to women in the workforce, Mr Abbott was an unreconstructed traditionalist who was now attempting to court the female vote.

"After years of entrenched views antagonistic to the interests of women, Tony Abbott is now trying to con the electorate," Ms Burrow said.

"His real views are contained in comments he has made recently that housework and ironing are the role of women.

"During his years as Employment Minister under John Howard, Mr Abbott never made any attempt to introduce a paid parental leave scheme. He is on record as opposing it."

In 2002, Mr Abbott told a Liberal Party function in Victoria:

"Compulsory paid maternity leave? Over this Government's dead body, frankly."

Ms Burrow said women fared extremely badly under WorkChoices, which took away job security, made it harder for mothers to balance their work and family responsibilities and saw a widening of the pay gap between men and women.

"To its credit, the Rudd Government has committed to a fully-funded, universal paid parental scheme that will start next year," Ms Burrow said.

"Will Mr Abbott support this legislation – or block it, like he does with every positive initiative from the Government?"

A new national TV ad campaign launched yesterday by unions highlights the negative impact on working families of Liberal leader Tony Abbott's plan to bring back WorkChoices. See the union TV ad at www.dontgoback.com.au

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