

WorkChoices did not go far enough: Mining boss

The Australian Resources and Energy Employer Association today claimed the Howard era WorkChoices agenda “did not go far enough”.

AREEA Chief executive, Steve Knott told the HR Nicholls Society in Melbourne that the business community should lobby the Coalition “as hard as possible” to scrap Australia’s entire modern awards system and severely restrict unfair dismissal protections.

The mining employer called for a wholesale restructuring of Australia’s industrial relations framework, starting with the abolition of the awards system and the unwinding of unfair dismissal rights.

“The awards system must be abolished and replaced with a simple standard safety net for all employees,” he said in his address. “Employers should have the right to make decisions about who to employ or not to employ and who to keep in their business and who not.”

The mining peak said while there is some business pressure on the Coalition to “nail their flag” to the mast and undertake to repeal much of the Albanese Government’s new workplace rights, he branded Coalition MPs “reform-shy” and “scared rabbits” unlikely to publicly back business demands.

At the same event, Federal Housing Minister, Michael Sukkar said Shadow Workplace Relations Minister, Michaela Cash had advised him not to go off script, but they would “get some of the subtext” of what he was saying about “turning the tide and restoring Australia’s prosperity through workplace reform.”

The mining employer group then urged the business community to be more “strategic and targeted” in pursuing their immediate workplace relations demands including lobbying in favour of:

- A new definition of casual employment that avoids employers being taken to court for engaging in permanent-casual employment rorts
- Making it harder for Unions to access Same Job Same Pay rights that have stopped wage-cutting labour hire schemes
- Using litigation to defeat multi-employer bargaining cases

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus:

“If mining employers had their way, we would see all the protections and rights of the current awards system torn up so that workers could be sacked on a whim, with little or no access to the Fair Work Commission umpire.

“Saying employers should have the right to make decisions about who to employ and who not to, is code for bosses being able to fire people for no reason and with no protective legal safeguards.

“Saying they want the market to decide what is fair pay; is just another prescription for another decade of Coalition governments when wages were squashed, and the cost-of-living crisis started.

“Flexibility, choice, freedom is the language of mining employers, but Australian workers know they are only ever talking about flexibility for them and abolishing hard won rights for workers.

“The mining employers say the HR Nicholls Society are the ‘deep thinkers’ on industrial relations. We now have clear evidence that what they want is for the Coalition to shred workers’ rights, lower wage rates and return to an even worse Work Choices agenda.”

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