

## Growing number of employers are recognising workers' rights under new IR system: unions

Rio Tinto's decision to negotiate a new collective agreement for train drivers in the Pilbara iron ore region is a welcome sign that the Rudd Government's Fair Work laws are working, say unions.

The decision is a shift from more than a decade of obstinate and aggressive tactics by Rio Tinto to prevent its employees from having the right to be represented by a union in wage negotiations.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said the decision was a tribute to the determination of train drivers in the Pilbara to exercise their rights. It was also showed that the Fair Work Act was having an impact in altering employer behaviour and encouraging collective bargaining in workplaces.

"The decision by Rio Tinto is a major advance and sends a positive message to other employers that they must respect fundamental workers' rights to collective bargaining and union membership," Mr Lawrence said.

"Collective bargaining is the centrepiece of the new IR system, and will produce better wages and conditions for workers and higher productivity for the economy.

"Rio Tinto was a standard bearer of the old system by using individual contracts to prevent workers from bargaining collectively and being represented by their union.

"Previously, Rio Tinto has used every legal avenue possible to block this group of workers from exercising their rights. This is only the first step towards an agreement, but we would hope to see this new co-operative approach flow through in time to the rest of Rio Tinto's operations.

"Rio Tinto joins a growing number of major companies, including Telstra and several of the big banks, have also acknowledged reality and changed their attitude in recent months to embrace collective bargaining."

Mr Lawrence contrasted the decision by Rio Tinto with the hostile approach of a small number of employers in the West Australian offshore oil and gas industry.

Employers have prolonged an industrial dispute by refusing to bargain in good faith with the Maritime Union of Australia. Mr Lawrence said it was the height of hypocrisy for employer groups to be calling for the government to intervene in the offshore dispute.

"Employers consistently opposed arbitration during negotiations for the Fair Work Bill, yet as soon as maritime workers exercise their rights they go running to the government for help," Mr Lawrence said.

"Employers can't have it both ways. Good faith collective bargaining is the best way to resolve wage negotiations."

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