

Friday, 13 July 2012

## Just what kind of “workers’ best friend” does Tony Abbott really intend to be?

If Tony Abbott really wants to be the “best friend” of Australian workers, he should immediately release in full his proposed industrial relations policy, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said that Mr Abbott’s claim that “If the coalition wins the next election, the workers of Australia will find that I am their best friend” was outrageous given Mr Abbott’s history of attacks on workers and their rights.

She said Mr Abbott could not be trusted, given his mentor, John Howard, had used virtually the same words before introducing WorkChoices without any prior warning.

“Tony Abbott’s history shows he is anything but the workers’ best friend,” Ms Kearney said.

“When he was Workplace Relations Minister, he laid the foundations for WorkChoices with an aggressive agenda of attacking workers and their rights.

“He needs to be upfront about what he intends to do to penalty rates, to unfair dismissal, to public holidays and a raft of other protections and rights that the Liberal Party and the business lobby have a long history of opposing.

“Australian workers have long memories, and they do not forget that John Howard had also claimed to be the workers’ best friend before introducing WorkChoices, having never taken the policy to an election.

“Unions are determined to expose the Liberal Party’s real agenda because Tony Abbott cannot hoodwink the Australian public.”

Ms Kearney said Mr Abbott’s record as Workplace Relations Minister included:

- Opposing decent wage increases for the low paid.
- Winding back unfair dismissal protection.
- Implementing the widespread use of AWAs in the public service.
- Opposing improvements to awards.
- Linking federal funding to his IR agenda.

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver, in a speech in Newcastle last night, vowed that unions would unite to oppose any attempt to undermine workplace rights and protections.

“We will not stand by and let him take Australia back to a dog-eat-dog industrial relations system, where low-paid workers have their penalty rates and other rights at work stripped by individual flexibility arrangements that undermine their collective agreements,” he said.

“The Australian people do not want this. And that is why Tony Abbott has been so careful to conceal his plans.”

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