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Tony Abbott's mentor John Howard reveals Coalition's real agenda for Australian workplaces

Individual contracts that cut pay and conditions and less protection from unfair dismissal are now well and truly at the top of the Coalition's wishlist for Australian workers after the Liberals' elder statesman John Howard let slip their real agenda, say unions.

John Howard's call for a return to WorkChoices and an end to protection from unfair dismissal shows that attacking workers' rights is core Liberal philosophy, despite Tony Abbott's denials, said ACTU President Ged Kearney.

ACTU president Ged Kearney said Mr Howard's comments reported in today's media that he wanted a future Coalition government to return to individual employment contracts were an indication of the real agenda of the Liberal Party to return to Work Choices.

Ms Kearney said Mr Howard's comments on unfair dismissal were also inaccurate and insulting to workers.

"John Howard's comments reveal that the Liberals' love affair with WorkChoices remains as strong as ever," Ms Kearney said. "It is clear that big business and anti-worker zealots within the Coalition want Mr Abbott to take a hardline approach on industrial relations, and the Opposition Leader needs to be honest with the Australian public about his intentions.

"We need to know whether low-paid workers will have their pay and conditions slashed under an Abbott Government, as they did during Work Choices.

"Under the individual agreements of the Howard-era, 70% removed shift loadings, 65% removed penalty rates and 50% removed overtime and public holiday pay. Tony Abbott needs to say if this is the future he wants for workers. WorkChoices also made it easy for employers to sack workers with no rights to unfair dismissal.

"Any further changes to workplace laws should improve job security, rights and protections for Australian workers, not hand more power to employers."

Ms Kearney said Mr Abbott also needed to be upfront with Australian households about whether he would impose the GST on food, as Mr Howard is urging.

"The Liberals' prescription would attack Australians in their workplace and around their kitchen table," Ms Kearney said.

Ms Kearney said unions would continue to fight for the right of workers to be represented by a union in collective bargaining and to stop the use of unfair individual agreements that drove down pay and conditions.

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