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Australian workers want better job security, not a return to WorkChoices-style policies: unions

Plans by the Liberal Party to re-embrace individual contracts and slash unfair dismissal protections would put at risk the pay and job security of millions of Australians at a time when they are experiencing cost of living pressures, say unions.

Tony Abbott's mentor, John Howard, has today added to the chorus of senior Liberal Party figures advocating a return of WorkChoices-style policies.

With Mr Abbott recently declaring he would take a "stronger" industrial relations policy to the next election, working Australians will rightly be concerned about a new attack on their rights at work.

"Scratch the surface, and WorkChoices-style policies are still very much alive within the Liberal Party," said ACTU President Ged Kearney.

"A few strong opinion polls results, and the Liberals are already arrogantly planning to reintroduce the core elements of WorkChoices after the next election.

"With households under growing cost of living pressures, working Australians cannot afford to gamble with a workplace system that would make it even harder for them to maintain a decent standard of living.

"About 40% of the workforce is in casual or non-permanent employment, and they need better workplace rights, not a recipe to reduce their job security."

In an interview on the ABC's *Insiders* program today, former Prime Minister John Howard said it was a "tragedy" that WorkChoices had been removed. He called for the Liberal Party to revisit individual contracts and reduced unfair dismissal protections.

Mr Howard's comments follow that of former Liberal Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith, who said recently that WorkChoices-style policies were in the Liberals' DNA.

"It is not just his political mentors of the past who are coming back to haunt Tony Abbott," Ms Kearney said.

"His front bench includes the chief WorkChoices salesman, Joe Hockey, while an entire new generation of Liberal backbenchers want the party to adopt hardline workplace policies.

"So, not only is WorkChoices not dead – it's not even buried."

Ms Kearney said calls from the Liberals and business groups for changes to the *Fair Work Act* were not substantiated by the facts.

She said while there were areas where it could be improved, the Act had been good for workers and good for the economy.

A special report, *The Fair Work Act: Two Years On* is available at www.actu.org.au

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