



Australian Council of Trade Unions

MEDIA RELEASE

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New protections and minimum standards will be better for all Australian workers

New minimum employment standards that come into effect on New Year's Day will be good for all Australian workers and represent a major step forward from WorkChoices, say unions.

Welcoming the changes, the ACTU says the 10 National Employment Standards deliver on a core part of the Your Rights at Work union and community campaign against WorkChoices.

They set out minimum entitlements for all workers that cannot be taken away under any circumstances, including hours of work, leave, notice of termination and redundancy pay.

Also, a raft of modern industry awards which begin to take effect from 1 January will provide additional enforceable minimum employment terms and conditions for hundreds of thousands of other workers, including minimum wages, penalty rates, and superannuation.

But ACTU President Sharan Burrow said the newly-won rights and protections were already under threat from the Federal Opposition led by Tony Abbott, who has signalled he wants to bring back a new version of WorkChoices.

"We've come a long way in the past two years since the successful union and community campaign against the former Liberal Government's WorkChoices laws," Ms Burrow said.

"Those laws removed protection from unfair dismissal gave many young and vulnerable workers little or no job security.

"They stripped away the safety net and made it almost impossible for workers to collectively bargain, exposing them to harassment or discrimination for joining a union.

"The new rights and protections that come into force on New Year's Day are in addition to enhanced unfair dismissal protection, rights to collective bargaining and a good faith bargaining regime for all workers that began in July 2009."

A key innovation in the improved safety net is a new right to request flexible working arrangements.

Employers will for the first time have a legal obligation to seriously consider a request for flexible work arrangements – such as different start and finish times, or working from home – and only refuse it on reasonable business grounds.

Ms Burrow said this was a crucial breakthrough for working parents juggling family responsibilities, but would also benefit employers by increasing staff retention, reducing absenteeism, and achieving greater productivity through increased job satisfaction.

"Parents and carers often face obstacles to participating in the workforce, and one significant hurdle has always been inflexible working hours. Improving workforce participation for parents is an ongoing goal of Australian unions," Ms Burrow said.

Unions will be working with the Federal Government to ensure workers are informed of their improved rights and employers are aware of their new obligations.

More information about the new rights and protections is available at www.actu.asn.au

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www.actu.asn.au

your rights at work — worth fighting for