

A quarter of workforce to lose unfair dismissal protection under Liberals' new WorkChoices

More than 2.3 million workers - almost one in four - will lose protection from unfair dismissal under the Liberals' WorkChoices Mark II.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said the Liberals' plan, which is confirmed by the Opposition's Workplace spokesman Eric Abetz, in media reports today would exempt 9 out of 10 businesses from unfair dismissal laws.

They would have the freedom to sack workers on a whim, Ms Burrow said.

The Fair Work Act restored unfair dismissal rights to about 4.6 million workers who now have protection, subject to a qualifying period.

"Under WorkChoices, many young people, women and other vulnerable workers were sacked unfairly," Ms Burrow said.

"Now, they are at risk again. No matter how long you have been employed, how loyal your service, if you work for a business of less than 20 staff, you could be sacked without notice under the plans of Tony Abbott and Eric Abetz.

"This comes on top of their proposals to reintroduce WorkChoices-style individual contracts, rip apart the award system that protects wages and conditions, and cut penalty rates.

"The Liberals simply cannot be trusted by Australian workers, and no-one is fooled by changing the name of WorkChoices.

Brisbane childcare worker Emily Connor was 21 when she was sacked without notice in 2006.

"The very same day WorkChoices came in, I started work at 9am and she sacked me at 10am and told me to leave the premises or she would call the police and have me arrested for trespassing," she said.

"I can understand that employers may want to replace people who are not performing but there needs to be a balance and a fair process.

"This would open it up to anyone being sacked for any reason. It would be a massive backward step."

Ms Burrow said less protection from unfair dismissal was the second highest concern under a Liberal Government of 2099 voters recently polled by the ACTU, with 32% saying that they expected employees would have less protection from unfair dismissal.

The highest concern was potential cuts to wages and conditions. The Liberals have already signaled they will target wages and conditions, beginning with penalty rates, which many workers rely on to supplement their family income.

Emily Connor is available for interview.

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