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One year on, Fair Work laws have restored protections lost under WorkChoices: unions

The first anniversary of the passage of the Fair Work laws has highlighted the huge gap between the two major parties on industrial relations, say unions.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said the Fair Work Act had restored many rights for workers that had not existed under WorkChoices.

But he said these rights were under threat again because of Tony Abbott's plans to bring back a new version of WorkChoices under a different name.

Mr Lawrence welcomed comments from the Deputy Prime Minister indicating that the Government will not give in to pressure from employer groups to wind back the new protections.

"The Fair Work Act is a major step forward for workers' rights in Australia after these were stripped away by WorkChoices," Mr Lawrence said.

"The Rudd Government has abolished Australian Workplace Agreements, restored protection from unfair dismissal for millions of workers, put in place a strong safety net – including a modern system of awards – and established an independent workplace umpire. The Fair Work Act also guarantees rights to collective bargaining and union membership and representation.

"This is light years away from WorkChoices, under which employers used individual contracts and the lack of unfair dismissal protection to strip away pay and conditions for vulnerable workers, including women and young people.

"It is clear that some extremist employer groups not only hark back to WorkChoices, but want to go even further. Working Australians are rightly concerned about what Tony Abbott and the Liberals are cooking up for their industrial relations policy for this election.

"No matter what they call it, it will include a return to individual contracts and the removal of unfair dismissal protection for millions of workers. That is WorkChoices by another name."

Mr Lawrence said while the basic framework of the Fair Work Act was a great start, unions would continue to seek further improvements that are necessary to better protect workers and ensure fairness in Australian workplaces.

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