

Wednesday, 8 December 2010

WorkChoices is alive and well under Liberals in Western Australia, say unions

WorkChoices is on the way back in Western Australia following the release of a long-awaited review of the state's industrial relations system, say unions.

The rights and conditions of about 300,000 West Australian workers will be at risk from the recommendations of the Amendola report, which was commissioned by the Barnett Government.

The report recommends reinstating two key aspects of WorkChoices – giving employers the power to insist their employees sign individual contracts, and removing all protection from unfair dismissal in small businesses.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said the review confirmed the worst fears of unions that the Liberal Government in WA would swing back to WorkChoices at the first opportunity.

He said unions would campaign to protect the rights of WA workers.

“The review commissioned by the Barnett Government confirms what has always been suspected: that WorkChoices is in the Liberal Party's blood.

“It is little wonder that the WA Government deliberately with-held the public release of this report during the federal election campaign, because it lifts the lid on the Liberal Party's true agenda.

“The Amendola report recommends that workers in WA have no guaranteed right to collective bargaining, as is the case under the federal Fair Work laws. And where there is no collective agreement in place, it would give employers the power to make a worker sign an individual contract that dictates pay and conditions if they want a job.

“Workers in businesses of less than 20 employees could lose their job at an employer's whim, with no legal remedy for unfair dismissal. And the rights to take industrial action or seek arbitration of a dispute would also be curtailed.

“Western Australia has been the state where the Liberals try out their extreme IR agenda first before spreading it nationally. In the 1990s, the Court Government gave WorkChoices a dry run with industrial relations changes that saw individual contracts introduced and minimum standards cut.

“History is repeating itself, and there is no doubt that the WA review reflects Liberal Party thinking on industrial relations.”

The review of the WA industrial relations system was conducted by Steven Amendola, a Melbourne-based lawyer who not only helped draft the Howard Government's WorkChoices laws and advised the Howard Government during the 1998 Maritime Dispute, but was often the lawyer of choice for Liberal IR Ministers Tony Abbott and Peter Reith.

The Amendola review cost WA taxpayers \$850,000 and was handed to the WA Government in December 2009, but was only released to the public this week.

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