

Liberals, WorkChoices and individual contracts: the love that dare not speak its name

The Liberals' determination to bring back WorkChoices-style individual contracts is a threat to the pay, conditions and job security of working Australians, say unions.

Under WorkChoices, Australian Workplace Agreements were used by employers to cut pay and take away basic conditions and the job security of Australian workers.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said new Liberal leader Tony Abbott's plan to bring back WorkChoices would be a disaster for working Australians in fragile economic times when unemployment is still rising.

Official data shows that workers on individual contracts earn much less than those employed under collective agreements – as much as \$8000 a year.

In a newspaper interview today, Mr Abbott has declared that he wants to retain individual contracts "whatever they are called". And his deputy, Julie Bishop, has backed him up.

Mr Abbott also said:

"Our policy will be to have freer, more flexible and fair labour markets without going anywhere near that dreaded policy that must not speak its name."

Mr Abbott has previously described the end of AWAs as "a great leap backwards".

"Day two of the Abbott-Bishop Liberal opposition, and the new leader has confirmed he wants to bring back AWAs, which stripped away pay and conditions and undermined the job security of hundreds of thousands of Australians," Ms Burrow said.

"It won't be long before he announces the re-introduction of other elements of WorkChoices, such as the removal of protection from unfair dismissal for three million Australians.

"Mr Abbott is a staunch believer in WorkChoices and his track record shows that he cannot be trusted by Australian workers.

"Egged on by big business, he and Ms Bishop will reintroduce the Liberals' hardline industrial relations laws if they get the chance.

"When Mr Abbott talks of free and flexible labour markets, he means only one thing: giving big businesses the power to drive down workers' wages and conditions.

"It is ridiculous for Mr Abbott to claim WorkChoices was a boon for Australian workers.

"The fact is more than a million workers saw their real wages fall by up to \$91.49 a week under WorkChoices," Ms Burrow said.

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