

Abbott's 'no worker will be worse off' claim is dishonest: 3 million to lose unfair dismissal protection

Liberal leader Tony Abbott's claim that 'no workers would be worse off' under his industrial relations policy is patently dishonest, say unions.

Yesterday, Mr Abbott refused to guarantee that he would not again scrap the No Disadvantage Test, as the last Liberal Government did with WorkChoices.

Instead, he gave a non-committal answer at his press conference:

"I'm not going to pre-empt the policy development process, but you can be confident . . . that we will want to ensure that no worker is worse off as a result of the changes that we will propose."

Since being elected Liberal leader Mr Abbott has already declared he wants to reintroduce WorkChoices-style individual contracts that cut workers' pay and stripped away award conditions.

Mr Abbott and new hardline Workplace Relations Shadow Minister Eric Abetz have also pledged to remove unfair dismissal protection for workers in small businesses.

"This change alone would mean more than three million working Australians would be immediately worse off," said ACTU President Sharan Burrow. "Under a Liberal Government, they would lose the security of knowing they cannot be sacked unfairly.

She said Mr Abbott's mentor, John Howard, broke a similar pledge given when he was Opposition Leader, just a couple of months before winning the 1996 election:

"Under a Howard Government you cannot be worse off, but you can be better off. I give this rock solid guarantee our policy will not cause a cut in the take home pay of Australian workers."

"History shows that the Coalition walked away from that promise by introducing WorkChoices, which ripped away pay, conditions and job security for Australian workers.

"The Coalition Government then spent \$121 million of taxpayers' money on deceptive advertising to promote WorkChoices — some of which Senator Abetz personally authorised.

"The Liberals simply cannot be trusted on industrial relations. Everyone knows that WorkChoices is in their blood," said Ms Burrow.

New ILO report backs stimulus program

Ms Burrow said the Opposition's calls for the economic stimulus program to be wound back would be a dangerous folly when the Australian economy was still poised at a fragile stage.

A major new report by the International Labour Organisation has praised the "quick and decisive" response by the Australian Government as shielding the economy from recession.

But it warns that an early exit from economic stimulus programs could postpone or set back the jobs recovery from the Global Financial Crisis.

"Australian unemployment is still rising and winding back the stimulus prematurely as the Coalition is proposing could send the economy into a second downturn," Ms Burrow said.

The report shows that Australia's level of government debt is low by world standards.