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Rights, wages and conditions on trial in Abbott Government review

The terms of reference made public today in the media are a complete repudiation of the Abbott Government's pre-election promise to workers that wholesale changes were not on the agenda, the ACTU said today.

"The terms of reference revealed today put the whole workplace system on trial – pay and conditions, rights at work, collective bargaining and unfair dismissal are all on trial by the Productivity Commission," President of the ACTU, Ms Ged Kearney said today.

"Workers need to understand the scope of this review, because its outcomes will have a direct impact on them.

"The last time the Coalition were in Government they put in WorkChoices, the most radical change to our industrial relations system in 100 years.

"This time, despite all their promises, the Coalition clearly intend to put the system that Australian workers rely on for decent wages on trial," Ms. Kearney said.

The terms of reference lists the matters that will be looked at, and its scope is very broad.

"It's also revealing that there a number of objectives in the current Act which the Government hasn't included in the Terms of Reference, including the needs of the low-paid, the enforceability of wages and conditions, work-life balance, representation and the prevention of discrimination," Ms Kearney said.

Ms Kearney said that the public should be alarmed about the direction of the review.

"The Government has put its public view that Australian wages and conditions are too high, and too generous, and they have blamed workers for the loss of jobs going overseas.

"Given the sensitivity about these issues, the Government would only be asking for such a comprehensive review if they were determined make radical change.

"The Productivity Commission review will be the platform by which the Government can change the laws that protect Australian workers and make it easier for business to cut take home pay," Ms. Kearney said.

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