

Tuesday, 11 August 2015

Abbott Government turning back the clock on industrial relations

The Abbott Government has again shown it is beholden to ideology instead of the discipline of good government by trying to wind back the clock on industrial relations and talk up the dirty tactics used during the infamous 1998 Patrick's waterfront dispute.

With more than 800,000 Australians unemployed for the first time in 20 years, it's telling that the only jobs news out of the Government this week was Employment Minister Eric Abetz channelling Peter Reith with his response to the abominable midnight sackings of waterfront workers.

Last Thursday at midnight without any warning, Hutchison Ports Australia sacked 97 of its 224 workers in Sydney and Brisbane by text and email, telling them not to turn up to work again.

The company is a subsidiary of Hong-Kong based Hutchison Port Holdings, the world's largest port operator, and of Hutchison Whampoa Ltd, which made \$11 billion AUS in profit in 2014. The company is owned by Li Ka-Shing the 17th richest man in the world with an estimated net worth of \$27 billion.

Employment Minister Eric Abetz told the ABC he considered sacking by text message an 'appropriate methodology'.

In Senate question time yesterday, not only did Senator Abetz refuse to back away from his outrageous stance but couldn't contain himself from going one step further.

Rather than accept responsibility for the excessive tactics used by Patrick's and backed by Peter Reith in 1998, Abetz doubled down on the use of private security guards and dogs which are seen by all reasonable Australians as a form of intimidation.

Senator Cameron: *Can the minister confirm that midnight text messages and emails have replaced balaclavas and dogs as the preferred method of sacking waterfront workers?*

Senator Abetz: *"...the balaclavas were, in fact, used by certain workers to protect themselves from being identified in retaliatory action by the MUA."*

The tactics used by Patrick's – who were backed by Peter Reith and the Howard Government – were widely seen as putting the company on the wrong side of public opinion. Images of a balaclava-clad private security guard at the Hutchison container terminal at sunny Port Botany have been reported this week.

The ACTU is launching an online campaign to give Eric Abetz a taste of his own medicine and sack him by text.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver:

"With more than 800,000 Australians unemployed for the first time in 20 years, workers are right to question why the Abbott Government isn't standing up for local jobs."

"It's clear that Senator Abetz wants to recreate the Peter Reith era of industrial relations and Australians know that means job losses and rights stripped away."

"When are Tony Abbott and Eric Abetz going to stop playing politics and stand up for Australian jobs?"

"If our Employment Minister won't support Australian jobs then he's in the wrong job – we call on the community to send a text to sack Eric Abetz."

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