

Talking point

WorkChoices ▶ It is the basic right of working people to have a voice in their workplace

What a pain ▶ Rheumatoid arthritis affects 0.5-1 per cent of people

Negotiating fairest way

A NY Tasmanian who's been sacked for no reason or forced to cop a pay cut under WorkChoices understands the importance of Labor's planned industrial relations reforms.

But the job is not yet done, and other democratic rights are still at risk.

The Liberal Party and big business groups are trying to water down the ALP's changes and threatening to block at least some of them in the Senate.

As a consequence, many employees' proper entitlements remain threatened, including unfair dismissal protections, safety procedures, family rosters and free negotiation rights.

That's why the ACTU this week is launching new TV ads across Tasmania so everyone knows about the need for decent rules at work.

The Federal Government has already banned new Australian Workplace Agreements, which has stopped individual contracts from ripping off basic rights. However, Labor's other changes are still to come in new laws expected later this year.

Without further changes to our IR laws, we cannot expect the productive workplace relationships needed for an efficient and competitive economy, for example through skills training.

After losing the last election, the Opposition should accept that WorkChoices has to go. But Liberal Leader Brendan Nelson says he will oppose Labor's unfair dismissal reforms, even though the ALP has already allowed special treatment for small businesses. The public has not been told what else the Liberals will try to stop.

Meanwhile employer groups want regula-

Reigniting the debate over WorkChoices by launching a new TV ad campaign in Hobart, ACTU secretary JEFF LAWRENCE says the job of reinstating workers' rights is not yet done

tions to stop bosses and workers from negotiating freely as they choose, including on vital issues as casual and contract employment, how businesses respond to climate change or union organising.

It is the basic right of working people in any democratic society to have a voice in their workplace, which they depend on for their livelihood and to support their families. But some employers still want to be able to refuse to negotiate if it suits them.

As well as being fair, the costs of regulating such unnecessary restrictions on bargaining are an extra expense for everyone, as many businesses have already experienced under the complex WorkChoices IR laws.

The Opposition and business groups should back down and support a new collective bargaining system that allows employers and their workers to negotiate and agree on any matter that suits them.

Some employers still want the right to refuse to negotiate. They demand the power to decide whether to respect workers' rights, which is a bit like saying they will pay tax only if it suits their business.



UNDERMINED: Workers need a strong voice.

Australian unions helped to increase national productivity in the 1990s through collective bargaining and cooperative relationships with employers, and I urge all businesses to be a positive part of the new system in the future.

Australian workers voted for their rights back at the last election. Now it's time for the politicians to deliver.