



TRANSCRIPT

THOUSANDS JOIN IR RALLIES DAY OF PROTEST

ACCI Chief Executive Peter Hendy on ABC Radio News - IR Protests - 28 June 2006.

Tens of thousands of people have joined rallies across Australia to protest against new industrial relations (IR) laws.

The unions and the Federal Opposition say the turnout has been terrific, but Federal Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews says turnout was poor.

Mr Andrews says people have recognised the union movement's fear campaign is not relevant to their everyday experiences.

He says most Australians went to work, instead of participating in the union rallies.

"I think there are people at the rally today because they're rusted-on members of unions," he said.

"There are people at the rally today because ... there was peer group pressure to be there, there are people at the rally today because essentially they support the Labor cause, and that's why they're there."

In Melbourne, where police estimate 80,000 people rallied, Opposition Leader Kim Beazley addressed the crowd.

ACTU president Sharan Burrow says the rally was made up of ordinary workers who were concerned the laws would put their rights at risk.

"These are actually working men and women, they're the people who keep our economies strong, they're saying for themselves, for their families, security for their children and grandchildren," she said.

"They want rights, they want to know that their jobs are protected and that they're free from unfair dismissal."

DEBATE OVER TURNOUT

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) says the total number of protesters nationally was less than 150,000.

The ACCI's chief executive Peter Hendy says that figure is less than 10 per cent of the membership of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, which has organised rallies across the country.

Mr Hendy says it has been a day of "inaction", with 98 per cent of workers ignoring the call to protest.

"The joker in the pack today is actually the ACTU which is actually protesting against reforms that [are] good for its own membership," he said.

But SA Unions secretary Janet Giles says the national response has clearly shown the contempt workers have for the laws.

"What today's demonstrated is that the momentum of this campaign is not waning, that union members, workers,

community members are out today again to say we're still determined to campaign against these laws," she said.

About 3,500 protesters marched in Adelaide.

RALLIES AROUND AUSTRALIA

Around 6,000 people have rallied in Brisbane, where the Opposition treasury spokesman urged Queenslanders to continue to fight the laws.

Wayne Swan says more Australians will become battlers under the Government's changes.

"They're not called AWAs for no reason, because they are against working Australians," he said.

"They're against working Australians because they set out to cut your wages and your working conditions.

"And if you refuse you can then get the sack.

"That's not the sort of industrial relations system we want for this country."

Also in Brisbane, ACTU Secretary Greg Combet told the crowd unions would continue to increase the fight.

"A concerted effort to make sure that everywhere we go, in every workplace, we seek from employers a guarantee that people will be treated fairly," he said.

"And I don't care if the laws make that illegal, we're going to stand up for what we believe in."

Unions say more than 30,000 people gathered for the protest rally in Blacktown in Sydney's west.

The group heard from a number of speakers and then marched through the centre of Blacktown, waving flags and chanting slogans.

Unions NSW secretary John Robertson said the high turnout shows that people are concerned about the IR reforms.

"People that are attending are from a whole spectrum of employment," he said.

"Firefighters, nurses, teachers, storemen, construction workers, all very concerned, not just for themselves but also for their kids."

BEACONSFIELD MINERS LEAD PROTEST

In Launceston, about 2,000 people marched through the streets chanting slogans and carrying banners.

The rally was led by past and present Beaconsfield miners, including rescued worker Brant Webb, and it concluded with a series of speakers at the Albert Hall.

Australian Workers Union national secretary Bill Shorten told the crowd individual contracts were eating away at the Australian way of life.

"We deserve hope, not failure," he said.

"We deserve an end to these unfair, sectarian, divisive, us-and-them industrial relations laws and rhetoric."

In Perth, several thousand people waving union flags and placards have gathered in Russell Square in Northbridge to voice their concerns about the IR laws.

Construction Union Secretary Kevin Reynolds praised those in attendance for their support and encouraged them to continue lobbying against the laws.

Community workers and university employees are leading industrial relations protests in Canberra.

Welfare workers were given the spotlight, telling the crowd that Canberra's most vulnerable would suffer if community workers were put onto lower wages.

Unions ACT spokesman Peter Malone says although the crowd was small, they are getting the message out that the new laws harm workers.

"Certainly the polls that we do show that the community is aware, and increasingly so," he said.

"But it is a long haul, and we will continue to educate the community, continue to put forward the facts of what this legislation means, and we hope that the community both young and old understand that."

Welfare worker Liz Dawson told the crowd Canberra's most vulnerable will be disadvantaged if those who care for them are forced to accept worse wages and conditions.

Meanwhile a separate protest by Australian National University staff was due to start at the university grounds.

In Darwin, about 200 people gathered at Raintree Park in the city to protest against the Federal Government's workplace changes.

Unions NT spokesman Joe Gallagher says the national protests will send a message to the Prime Minister.

"And that message is: Johnny we're not happy, and we're going to maintain this stuff until the next election and boot you out," he said.