



TRANSCRIPT

BUSINESS LOBBY LABELS IR RALLY TURNOUT 'A FIZZER'

ACCI Chief Executive Peter Hendy on ABC Radio News - ACTU Rally Fizzer - 30 November 2006

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) says the Melbourne rally against the federal industrial relations (IR) laws has attracted low numbers compared to previous protests.

The Melbourne rally is part of a national day of protest against the Federal Government's WorkChoices legislation. The demonstrations were organised by the union movement.

Unions had hoped 80,000 people would turn out to the MCG, but the rally drew about half that amount.

ACCI spokesman Peter Hendy says it shows most workers are no longer concerned about the new workplace laws.

"I would argue that it's a complete fizzer," he said.

"And if you only get 40,000 at the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground) after all the advertising they did, well a half full MCG is a sorry state.

"If they got 100,000 - and it's not sure they'll even get that across the country - that might cost something like \$31 million in lost GDP that we'll never get back.

"This is not a day of action, it's a day of inaction for the people involved."

The ACTU's Greg Combet says the turnout was smaller than expected, in part because many workers feared repercussions from their employers.

"Some people have approached me saying their workmates couldn't come because they felt concerned about their job," Mr Combet said.

After an address from the Opposition Leader Kim Beazley and a performance by Jimmy Barnes, the crowd marched to the city and converged on Federation Square.

There, union leaders including Brian Boyd vowed to continue fighting the national set of rules for work awards and conditions.

"But even an extra effort will be needed if we're going to get rid of that bastard [John] Howard," Mr Boyd said.

Sydney

The union movement in New South Wales is planning to expose a number of companies it says threatened workers not to take part in today's protest action against the new IR laws.

Police estimate that about 40,000 people attended the rally in Sydney, which formed part of the national day of protest.

Unions New South Wales secretary, John Robertson, says the number would have been much higher if workers had been

free from intimidation.

“What is clear is the environment that John Howard has established now allows employers to standover, threaten and intimidate workers without any recourse to an independent umpire,” Mr Robertson said.

“So we will move our tactics to weekends which ensures more workers will be able to freely attend these rallies which is what many of them want to do if they were free to choose.”

Government Response

Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews says the new IR laws have been good for Australian workers and the union movement is simply trying to recruit new members.

“This is a rallying cry for the union movement, who are losing their relevance in Australia,” he said.

“In the private sector, union membership has fallen to less than 17 per cent and basically, this is a political opportunity for them.

“I understand that but the reality is that the laws have worked in a very beneficial way for Australians.”

Victorian Premier Steve Bracks says his recent state election win is a strong endorsement of the Federal Labor party’s IR policy.

“The people in Victoria made it very clear on Saturday that they wanted a fair go in the workplace,” he said.

“Let’s make sure the people of Australia also say the same thing next year and have a Beazley Labor Government returned to give a fair go in the workplace for working Australians.”