



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

WORKCHOICES

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By Peter Hendy, Chief Executive, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Joe Isaacs argues against WorkChoices (“Government could send us back to the 19th century”, Business, 29/8). He claims we don’t need to continue labour market reform because we have created jobs over the past decade.

Rather than being an argument against WorkChoices, this is an argument for it. We have increased the number of jobs over the past decade because during the 1990s we started to introduce flexibility into our labour market. We needed to do that because a million Australians were put out of work during a recession when our old system of setting wages and conditions in a centralised one-size-fits-all way was incapable of protecting jobs.

We have made only limited steps forward and it is incumbent on us to keep doing so, otherwise we will not maintain our high living standards. Reform is also needed because over the past 10 years the challenge for Australia to be competitive in a globalised world has become even greater. We cannot stand still and let jobs be lost overseas. Failing to make changes such as WorkChoices would be very unfair to Australian families and working people who want their children to have the good living standards we now enjoy. Joe Isaac also claims that small business supported the old centralised award system. That’s nonsense. Award systems were compulsory, and small business had very little say.

Survey support after decades of legal compulsion is hardly evidence of real support.

In contrast, most small businesses know just how job-destroying the old unfair dismissal laws were, and welcome the change WorkChoices has made to unfair dismissal laws. Employer bodies are also seeing strong interest from small business in agreement making, as a better system.

Peter Hendy
Chief Executive
Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Canberra, ACT