



HEAVY HAND OF REGULATION WILL CRUSH JOBS

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

At the National Press Club on Tuesday, Federal Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd announced snippets of an ALP industrial relations policy that on almost every measure represents heavier regulation than the current laws.

Bit by bit he is drafting a job-destroying IR policy. ACTU secretary Greg Combet and other union bosses will be laughing all the way to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

We all know trade unions are running a massive scare campaign against WorkChoices. The Government says it's worth \$100 million. Whatever the cost, it is one of the biggest con jobs in the history of Australian political debate.

If you have to spend that much money selling an idea, then it's probably a pretty bad one. When people think about their workplace experiences over the past 12 months, they don't see these laws as having an unfair or extreme impact.

Under the ALP's policy proposals, unfair dismissal laws are to be reintroduced, penalty rates will be entrenched, AWAs will be abolished, there will be no legally sanctioned individual bargaining, and even the national industrial relations system will see the taxpayer financing duplicate state industrial relations systems just for government employees.

No wonder Combet was out of the blocks early, saying the proposed changes are a really good start.

Every IR announcement made by Rudd represents re-regulation. A roll-back, not an economic reform. In the case of AWAs, not just a roll-back of WorkChoices, but a roll-back of 10 years of workplace agreements.

Rudd said Labor would do three things about strikes -- secret ballots of workers should occur beforehand, workers striking illegally should not get paid and strikes should not be allowed while agreements are in effect. Good policy.

The only problem is that he did not say that all of these are the existing law -- or that they were all legislated for by the Howard Government and WorkChoices.

For a year, secret ballots have been required before strikes and banned during the life of agreements. Strike pay has been illegal for 10 years.

If Rudd wants to be tough on strikes, why does Labor policy allow strikes to occur over a wider range of matters, weaken laws against strikes in the building industry and reduce deterrents against secondary boycott strikes by taking unions outside of the enforcement power of the ACCC?

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