



National Office Bulletin

RTBU Members' Newsletter 6/2005

Unions respond to Howard's Blank Cheque: Comments from ACTU Leader, Greg Combet

In this edition of *your* RTBU National Office Bulletin, ACTU Secretary Greg Combet explains why workers and the community must act together to combat Howard's proposed destruction of your workplace rights

Importantly, this is not just a fight for unions but every working Australian. It is an attack on the things that make Australia what it is.

Who will be affected by the proposed changes?

Some changes will be immediate, some will take a while to notice.

There will be short term and longer term impacts from the proposed changes.

From Day 1

4 million Australian workers will lose protection against unfair dismissal.

Awards will be slashed to five minimum standards:

1. a minimum hourly rate of \$12.75 for workers.
2. 8 days sick leave per annum.
3. 4 weeks annual leave per year & no leave loading.
4. unpaid parental leave and,
5. axing all hours of work provisions except a 38 – 40 hour week.

Everything else is up for grabs!

In the longer term:

Those not in strong unions, and those not well organised, will see their working standards fall.

Strongly unionised workplaces will have to fight to maintain their wages and conditions of work. It is going to be harder to collectively bargain, and the job of union officials will be more challenging with the government proposing laws to restrict the ability of officials to enter workplaces of their members.

Everyone will face the threat of individual contracts which can contain just the 5 minimum conditions. These will reduce take home pay and living standards. What happens when you are put on an AWA and can no longer do important things on the weekend like coaching sporting team, volunteering for the SES, or rural fire service, or provide help to meals on wheels.

“There are many practical things that individual members can be involved in with this campaign and I would encourage you to participate. If we join together and participate, we will win it. These things take time, but we will win it if we believe in the fight for workers rights.”

What can you do to fight for workers' rights?

Members, delegates, activists must unite to fight for workers' rights and do it in a coherent way.

Building support in the community is critical to make sure people (not just union members) know what these changes mean.

Only Governments change the law, therefore we need to build political opposition to the government. In our workplace we must campaign to maintain and build on existing conditions.

The ACTU's Greg Combet explains that union members, delegates and activists can achieve this by:

Building and strengthening delegate networks as part of the campaign effort. Delegates and members need to understand the importance of collective bargaining as opposed to individual contracts.

Every delegate must talk to every member on the job and explain why individual contracts are dangerous. When you sign an AWA you are signing away the right to collectively bargain...

We have achieved current wages and working conditions through collective strength and only through collective strength will they be retained.

Next week there is a national week of coordinated activity – contact your RTBU organiser to find out more. In NSW, the week ends with a State-wide mass meeting via a SkyChannel link-up on Friday, 1 July 2005. For activities in other States, please ask your delegate or organiser for what's happening in your local area. It is important that you participate in events to show the Howard government that we are serious, that we are united, and that we will not be defeated.

Union officials have a role, but cannot do it alone. Unions are made up of workers and everyone who is a worker, whether they are a union member or not is affected by this. If you are interested in your wages and conditions then you have a responsibility to be involved in this campaign. Combet said that: