



media alert

Tuesday 13 November 2007

450,000 teachers, childcare & education workers could be the next target for AWAs if coalition re-elected

What: Early childhood professionals presenting postcards from childcare workers and parents to Michael Ferguson Liberal MHR for Bass and handing out flyers in the street outside Mr Ferguson's office.

When: 12.15pm, Tuesday November 13

Where: Cnr Wellington & York Streets, Launceston

Australia's 450,000 childcare workers, school teachers, TAFE and university staff could be the next target for AWA individual contracts under WorkChoices if the Howard Govt is re-elected, say unions. Childcare workers and Education workers across Australia will today highlight concerns that a re-elected Howard-Costello Govt will tie federal funding and incentives to the introduction of AWAs in the education and childcare sectors as part of the Liberals' move to extend WorkChoices after the election.

The federal government has already used the threat of cutting university funding by \$280 million to compulsorily push AWA contracts onto academic and other staff in the tertiary sector.

Workplace Relations Minister Joe Hockey last week refused to release research into a Govt plan to reduce the award safety net and push a further 1.5 million workers onto AWAs.

Meeting with childcare & education workers in Queensland today, ACTU President Sharan Burrow said:

"Childcare workers, School teachers, TAFE teachers and university staff could be the next people hurt by WorkChoices. Make no mistake, if the coalition is re-elected they'll go further with their IR laws.

"Working families and childcare workers need better group sizes, a better funding model and nationally consistent wages and classifications for childcare workers as a matter of urgency and they certainly don't need childcare professionals on wage-cutting AWAs.

"The Coalition has had eleven years to make a difference in a childcare sector that is in crisis. High quality, affordable childcare is a fundamental right for all working families as more and more families have to rely on two incomes to keep their heads above water. This government has sat on its hands when it comes to improving the quality, affordability and accessibility of childcare in Australia.

"Most early childhood workers in Australia are already low paid. They got a pay-rise of 15 cents per hour this year because of the coalition's IR laws compared with an average annual pay rise of \$3.82 per hour in the mining industry. The majority of childcare workers in Australia are women and this kind of disparity in pay rises is contributing to the widening the gender pay gap.

"Pushing AWAs into schools and the childcare sector will deter the best and brightest from pursuing teaching and childcare as careers and could threaten the quality of education provided to students and reduce the quality of care for our children. But the biggest cost will come at the expense of our kids."

Ms Burrow said the education and childcare sectors had already been undermined by Mr Howard's disastrous WorkChoices laws by:

- Changing the way minimum award wages are set for early childhood workers and reducing the award safety net.
- Threatening to withhold \$280 million from universities unless staff are offered AWAs and requiring new technical colleges to offer AWAs to staff.
- Removing unfair dismissal protection in many private schools and other workplaces employing less than 100 people.
- Abolishing award provisions that allow casual and contract teachers to convert to permanent employment.

Media Contact: Susan Wallace 0418372198/Rebecca Flanagan 0417372308