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Dole worth more: abattoir workers

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TWENTY-NINE meat workers from central NSW have become the reluctant face of the Howard Government's **workplace** reforms, handed their notice last week and then told to reapply for their jobs at a lower pay.

Cowra Abattoirs employees Ron Knight and Mick Doyle told The Australian last night that they could get more on the dole than the new jobs governed by a federal award.

Pig workers at the abattoir currently work under a tally system. They receive payment for slaughtering 280 pigs, regardless of how many they actually kill on the night.

Under the proposed federal award they will get just \$580 a week -- no tallies, no overtime and no penalty rates.

Mr Knight, 40, received \$880 before tax last week, and said that with three children he's better off claiming **unemployment** and other benefits.

"I can spend more time with my missus and kids," Mr Knight said.

Mr Doyle got his notice on his 48th birthday after 28 years with the company. He has three grown up boys, and is still paying off a mortgage.

Union delegate Gary Bryant spent yesterday fielding calls from workmates, and apprising an inspector from the newly enhanced Office of **Workplace** Services about how Cowra Abattoirs allegedly backed out of a three-year enterprise agreement with the pig workers with a year left to run.

Workplace Relations Minister **Kevin Andrews** yesterday confirmed the treatment of the 29 sacked workers was under investigation by OWS for possible breaches of **industrial** laws.

The key area for investigation involves how the 29 employees on \$764 a week were sacked last week and then invited to reapply for 20 positions with a \$186 pay cut. Mr Andrews reiterated warnings to employers not to misuse the new **workplace** laws. Cowra Abattoirs owner David Mulligan yesterday declined to comment.

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