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## **IR protection exposed as a sham: unions**

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UNIONS have launched a new assault on the Howard Government's workplace changes after a lawyer from one of the firms that drafted them admitted protected conditions for workers were really "smoke and mirrors".

Anthony Longland, a partner with Freehills, also advised employers to watch for competitors who abolished penalty rates and allowances and imposed few restrictions on working hours.

"They might be able to get a significant advantage over you in terms of labour costs," he told a Sydney legal conference.

**ACTU** secretary **Greg Combet** said the comments -- reported by online news service Workplace Express -- confirmed union claims that workers would not be protected from cuts to pay and conditions.

"This is exactly what the **ACTU** has been saying from the outset," he said. "We've been accused of running a scare campaign, accused of trying to elevate unnecessary fears about these laws. But here we have a partner of the firm who helped write the laws saying exactly what we have been putting: that the so-called protections under these laws are smoke and mirrors."

Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews denied that protected conditions in new laws were a "smoke and mirrors" exercise.

A spokesman for Mr Andrews said all employment contracts under the Work Choices laws had to be reached by agreement. The Government's position was clear: conditions such as penalty rates or meal breaks had to be specifically removed from agreements or else they would apply.

Mr Longland was reported as saying that protected conditions were really "smoke and mirrors". They were "protected but not protected" because they could be forgone if they were specifically overridden.

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