

# Unions sweep behind cleaners

Mark Skulley

Commercial property owners and high-profile tenants will be targeted in a union campaign for better treatment of cleaners and security workers.

Community and religious leaders will feature in the "Clean Start" campaign to be launched today by the Liquor, Hospitality & Miscellaneous Union at rallies in Australian capitals.

Protests in Auckland and Wellington will be run by the LHMU's New Zealand sister union.

The campaign is based on the successful "Justice for Janitors" campaign in the United States, which won support from religious leaders including a rabbi who criticised the treatment of cleaners in the Westfield group's US shopping malls.

The LHMU argues that Australian cleaners stand to lose up to 30 per cent of already low incomes, based on the experience of labour deregulation in New Zealand and in WA under the Court Liberal government.

They argue that, without intervention from owners, the new Work

Choices laws will force cleaning contractors to maintain market share by further undercutting each other on labour costs, hurting workers and lowering service quality.

The union is pushing for the property industry to agree to 10 principles that cover pay and conditions, freedom of association and health and safety.

LHMU national secretary Jeff Lawrence urged building owners to make a "principled decision" on

**"The new laws will force contractors to further undercut each other on labour costs."**

better security and pay that recognised the contribution of a hardworking, largely female immigrant workforce.

Building Services Contractors Association of Australia chief Rick MacKenzie said a possible "race to the bottom" on pay and conditions did not necessarily have to flow from Work Choices.

"The employees are our member's greatest asset and that's well

and truly recognised," Mr MacKenzie said.

"The association's position is that we want to protect employees' wages and entitlements."

The chief executive of the Property Council of Australia, Peter Verwer, said his members were the "customers of the [cleaning] industry, we don't police it".

In other developments, lawyers for Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews yesterday applied for the Australian Industrial Relations Commission to overturn a ruling that found unions had greater than expected initial scope for legally protected industrial action.

AIRC vice-president Michael Lawler found unions could take protected action over the next three months without a secret ballot being held first, provided they were in conciliation before Work Choices came into force on March 27.

But outside the commission, Mr Andrews has argued that secret ballots had to be held before any action was protected under Work Choices.

A full bench, led by AIRC president Geoffrey Giudice, has reserved its decision.



The LHMU argues cleaners could lose up to 30pc of their pay. Photo: GABRIELE CHAROTTE