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## Canberra accused of fresh plans to strip rights

Author: JOSH GORDON, ECONOMICS CORRESPONDENT, CANBERRA, With  
MICHELLE GRATTAN

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'Much to do' in **workplace**: Minchin

LABOR and the unions have accused the Government of hiding radical plans to further strip away workers' rights and conditions if it wins the next election.

Finance Minister **Nick Minchin**, one of the Coalition's most senior members, has warned that there is still "much more to do" in **industrial** relations, even though most Australians "violently disagree" with the current round of changes.

Speaking to the conservative H. R. Nicholls Society, a think tank co-founded by Treasurer **Peter Costello**, Senator Minchin said the Government should seek a mandate from the Australian people at the next election for more changes. "There is much more to do and I pray that we remain in Government and effect further change, but I do ask for your forgiveness - that change has not been as rapid as you would have liked," he said.

"This is evolution, not revolution, and there is still a long way to go . . . awards, the IR Commission, all the rest of it."

A spokesman for Senator Minchin said the comments represented his personal views, not Government policy.

Prime Minister **John Howard**, in India on a trade mission, gave a categorical guarantee that the Government would not take a new wave of **industrial** change to next year's election.

Repudiating the view of Senator Minchin, Mr Howard said it was not Government policy to go to the election with another major change.

"We have gone a long way in **industrial** relations reforms," he told reporters travelling with him in India. The changes passed last year were

not radical "but they were significant and we won't be taking further major proposals in that area to the election".

Pressed on why Senator Minchin was making such comments, Mr Howard repeated his minister's explanation. "He has said he was expressing a personal view," the Prime Minister said. "I'm telling you what the Government's position is."

The comments come as the Government prepares to bed down its changes, including measures to cut **union** influence, boost individual contracts and abolish unfair dismissal protection. A High Court challenge will test the Government's ability to override state **industrial** relations laws using its company powers.

Victorian Attorney-General Rob Hulls said it was "beyond comprehension" that a senior minister would make such comments if they were not in line with Government policy.

"Victorian workers are already living in fear of this attack on their conditions and rights in the **workplace**," Mr Hulls said. "Now the full horror of the Howard Government's plans has been revealed - that there is even worse to come."

Senator Minchin said he had personal motives for wanting to cut the influence of unions. He told of how, when he was 17 in 1970, criminal elements of the painters and dockers **union** had burgled \$1 million from his father's security business, ultimately forcing him to sell. "I had grown up thinking I'd love to work in this business . . . but on that night the painters and dockers destroyed my life plan," he said.

Senator Minchin also said there was a real prospect of the High Court overturning the current changes.

Opposition **industrial** relations spokesman **Stephen Smith** said Senator Minchin had "let the cat out of the bag". -- With MICHELLE GRATTAN

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