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## **Employers warn off their staff over rallies**

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Employers including Australia Post have begun warning that workers who attend protest rallies against the Work Choices laws without "appropriate leave" will face disciplinary action.

**ACTU** president **Sharan Burrow** argued yesterday that Australia Post was "actively threatening" workers with disciplinary action if they "choose to exercise their democratic right to protest" during national protests on Wednesday.

"What is inspiring is the number of workers who are sending the message they will not be bullied by employers who, as a result of the new IR law, now have much more power than ever before," she said.

Prime Minister John Howard said unions and workers were entitled to protest, provided they did not break any laws and were peaceful.

"I think their attitude on the changes is not in the interests of their members [and] I think the members of the **ACTU** have done very well individually under this government," he said.

Australia Post spokesman Matt Pollard said employees would be regarded as having taken industrial action if they took Wednesday without appropriate leave.

"We have no problem with people attending rallies in their own time," he said. "If they're rostered to work, they should be at work."

The Visy packaging group is understood to have unsuccessfully sought an order from the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, that would have prevented workers from a plant in Perth from attending Wednesday's protest.

Other employers are expected to take similar action and Australian Business Lawyers partner John Stanton warned that employees might be putting pay at risk if they took part.

"Prudent employers should remind employees of their legal obligation to attend and perform work in the usual manner, and ensure that all employees are aware of the consequences of abusing sick leave and other forms of leave," he said.

Economic forecaster BIS Shrapnel said in a report that the claimed benefits of Australian workplace agreements and individual contracts were overblown.

BIS Shrapnel senior economist Matthew Hassan said AWAs and individual contracts did little to boost productivity, compared with workplace enterprise agreements.

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