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Revealed: hidden edge to IR changes

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THE final details of John Howard's workplace changes reveal the Government is requiring a weekly check-up on industrial disputes, in what the union leader **Greg Combet** likens to "communist-style control".

The Australian Industrial Relations Commission will supply weekly reports on disputes, including secret ballots, under the new provisions contained in 400 pages of regulations released at the weekend.

The regulations also list what constitutes "prohibited content" in the agreement process, including payroll deduction of union fees and providing for union right of entry into workplaces.

The Minister for Workplace Relations, Kevin Andrews, described the regulations as "a major package" and denied they were designed to undermine union finances.

But Mr Combet, secretary of the **Australian Council of Trade Unions**, said: "This is communist-style control. Kevin Andrews is setting himself up as Stalin."

Requiring the Industrial Relations Commission to provide weekly reports on parties and issues that came before it was using the commission as a "spy agency", Mr Combet said.

"And now he has given himself the power to quash any agreement he doesn't like."

Mr Andrews's spokesman last night said the new measures did not mean the Government was re-regulating industrial relations but it had decided to require weekly reports because it was "deemed it was important we know what's going on in IR".

The release of the regulations immediately after elections in South Australia and Tasmania came as the Government rejected Labor claims that the industrial relations changes were a factor in the Liberals' defeats.

The Prime Minister, John Howard, dismissed the claims as "a piece of spin and propaganda", and Mr Andrews said they were "simply nonsense".

But in Tasmania, the Liberal Opposition Leader, Rene Hidding, said the introduction of new federal industrial relations laws was "decidedly not useful".

The federal Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, said the workplace changes were a "secondary" feature in the elections. "One thing is absolutely clear: ordinary Australians are now looking for protections from John Howard's extremism, and that includes elections of state Labor governments."

Releasing the regulations yesterday, Mr Andrews said they contained "a myriad of matters" broadly in keeping with details published in the original workplace changes document released in October.

Details included how secret ballots were to be conducted during industrial disputes and covered the issues of agreements not fully decided in state jurisdictions when the new system takes effect next Monday.

"This is significant legislation, but it is fair legislation. It is legislation designed to ensure that Australia's productivity continues to grow," Mr Andrews said.

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