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Dealing begins as new IR laws bite

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MANUFACTURING workers, low-paid contractors, meat workers and public servants are likely to be the first employees to strike deals under new workplace laws next week.

Qantas and Westpac are also likely to be among the first companies to use the Federal Government's new laws in enterprise negotiations with workers.

As employers and unions absorbed hundreds of regulations released by the Government at the weekend, the **ACTU** said its renewed media campaign against the changes would begin on Sunday - a day before the new regime commences.

ACTU secretary **Greg Combet** repeated his threat to refuse to pay fines of up to \$33,000 for including banned clauses in agreements that protect jobs.

"I will ask for people to be treated fairly and I'm not going to pay a fine for doing it," he said.

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union Victorian secretary Dave Oliver, whose union is renegotiating 1100 manufacturing agreements over the next six months, said he would join Mr Combet in a campaign of civil disobedience. "They might have to build bigger prisons to accommodate us all," he said.

Mr Combet said employers in the meat industry were becoming more aggressive.

He claimed Wangaratta abattoir G. A. Gathercole was likely to be one of the first companies to make use of the new legislation.

About 30 workers at Gathercole were on strike last week. A spokesman defended the deal offered. "The workers will end up with more money in their pay packets at the end of each working week," he said.

Certified agreements covering 40,000 defence and Tax Office employees are due to expire in the first half of this year, as are 1100 manufacturing agreements.

Mr Oliver expects Qantas to seize on the new laws in union negotiations. Westpac also has indicated it wants to look at the new laws after talks with staff over a new agreement broke down more than a year ago.

A spokesman said the bank would be happy to negotiate a collective agreement.

Workplace Minister Kevin Andrews labelled attacks by the unions and Labor as "hysterical outbursts" and called for critics to look at the facts.

He said it was appropriate for him to receive weekly reports on strikes, and regular reports on all new agreements.

Prime Minister John Howard yesterday defended the changes, saying the legislation was "not extreme".

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