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Andrews denies he's a new IR commissar

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THE Howard Government has denied it plans to take an interventionist role under new workplace laws, despite issuing regulations that require detailed weekly reports for the first time on union strikes and secret ballots.

Minister for Workplace Relations Kevin Andrews yesterday rejected union claims that the new reporting rules were an attempt to centralise government control in the new workplace system that comes into force next week.

Mr Andrews said that the Australian Industrial Relations Commission was already required to send reports to the minister. The Government had merely "modernised" these provisions because he wanted more regular reports from the AIRC and some of its functions were switching to another authority.

"We think that in some circumstances a shorter time frame for reporting, namely a week, is more appropriate than a month," he said. "People would be criticising me if they were asking about what was going on and I didn't know."

State governments yesterday reaffirmed their commitment to fight the new federal workplace laws in the High Court saying the new regulations showed the reforms were even more "anti-family and anti-union" than anticipated. Queensland, NSW, South Australian and West Australian governments successfully fought to extend the deadline for High Court submissions until after the release of the regulations.

The four states will argue the new laws exceed the commonwealth's constitutional powers.

"These regulations confirm the Howard Government's ruthless determination to drive down wages and conditions," Queensland Industrial Relations Minister Tom Barton said.

NSW Industrial Relations Minister John Della Bosca also criticised the regulations as "complex, heavy-handed and unfair" and said they threatened workers' leave entitlements.

``The regulations make it very clear that workers can be deprived of their annual holidays as part of individual workplace agreements," he told The Australian yesterday.

While **ACTU** secretary **Greg Combet** has accused the Government of wanting Stalinist control in its overhaul of workplace laws, Mr Andrews rejected the claims yesterday as ``hysterical outbursts". Under present regulations, the minister is limited to reports every three to four weeks on wage agreements and applications to stop strike action. In future he will get weekly reports on when unions want secret ballots, bargaining periods, and other activity.

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