

[[Previous](#)] [[Major News - ACTU Mentions](#)] [[Next](#)]

Friday 24 March 2006



Strikes to start from scratch

Author: Brad Norington

Publication: The Australian (005, Fri 24 Mar 2006)

Edition: 1 - All-round Country

Keywords: **ACTU (2), Greg (1), Combet (1)**

THE Howard Government has warned unions that all authorised strikes will be illegal when its new workplace laws come into force on Monday, exposing unions to millions of dollars in damages from employers' claims if they proceed.

Workplace Minister Kevin Andrews issued the warning yesterday, saying any industrial action would need a fresh application for a bargaining period and a compulsory secret ballot.

The Government's guillotine on legally protected strike action from Monday means that many unions will have to start their bargaining process with employers from scratch.

One of the most prominent groups to be affected will be Qantas maintenance engineers, who plan a walkout today and have foreshadowed further strikes over pay rates and sending jobs offshore.

ACTU secretary **Greg Combet** said the new laws were highly unusual because they allowed no transitional provisions for existing disputes or negotiations to continue.

``So anything that is part-way through will stop on Monday," Mr Combet said. ``The obvious example is Qantas ... But there are plenty of them around."

The **ACTU** leader said fresh compulsory secret ballots could take weeks or months to complete, with employers able to launch legal challenges every step of the way.

Employers, other companies affected by strikes and the minister himself would also be able to intervene and seek cooling-off periods that suspend strikes.

Under the Government's 1996 laws that will be scrapped at midnight on Sunday, unions could take legally protected strike action during a registered bargaining period to negotiate an enterprise agreement with an employer. They held membership ballots before strikes, but the process was quicker and more informal, such as a show of hands at a union meeting.

From Monday, the minimum standard against which all new agreements are tested will no longer be an employee's award but five conditions -- a minimum wage, annual leave, sick pay, parental leave and an average 38-hour week.

Headline: Strikes to start from scratch

Author: Brad Norington

Edition: 1 - All-round Country

Section: Local

[[Previous](#)] [[Major News - ACTU Mentions](#)] [[Next](#)]

Copyright © News Ltd