

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

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Key voters vexed over IR reforms

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ONLY one in four voters in key Coalition-held marginal seats supports the Howard Government's new industrial relations system.

And 59 per cent said their misgivings about the IR overhaul are strong reasons for voting against the Government at the next election.

The findings -- contained in an **ACTU**-commissioned poll -- coincide with day one of the new laws today.

Prime Minister John Howard yesterday said he was braced for a union scare campaign, but predicted it would fail amid increased employment and productivity.

``Over time it will be very beneficial," the PM said.

``I do not believe that the world is going to come to an end or the sky will fall in next week."

But **ACTU** secretary **Greg Combet** warned the impact of changes would be felt immediately, with the removal of unfair dismissal protection for workers in small to medium firms.

``The first person who's sacked unfairly can send a thank-you note to John Howard for that," Mr Combet said.

``It's likely somewhere around Australia tomorrow someone's going to be sacked unfairly and they'll be the first victim of the new laws."

Today's IR start-up comes as Parliament resumes for the final week before the May 9 Budget.

The **ACTU**'s opinion poll, released to the Herald Sun last night, confirmed recent remarks by Finance Minister Nick Minchin that Australians violently disagreed with the new system.

The **ACTU** commissioned polling organisation Auspoll to survey 1001 voters in 24 Coalition-held marginal seats around the nation -- including Victorian electorates Corangamite, McEwen and McMillan.

Of those surveyed, 62 per cent opposed the system to some degree.

Twenty two per cent said they were opposed with 40 per cent strongly opposed.

In contrast, 16 per cent said they supported the changes and 9 per cent were strongly in support.

The poll found 72 per cent support for unfair dismissal laws that protect workers.

Fifty-nine per cent agreed either a little or a lot with the proposition that the Government cared more about big corporations than workers -- and that this was a strong reason to vote against the Government.

The **ACTU** poll was conducted between February 22 and March 2, and contained a standard error of 3.16 per cent.

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