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Tuesday 28 March 2006

Herald Sun

Three sacked under reforms

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Publication: Herald Sun (002,Tue 28 Mar 2006)
Edition: 1 - FIRST
Keywords: **ACTU (1),Greg (1),Combet (1)**

A MELBOURNE cabinetmaking firm sacked three of its workers yesterday as the Federal Government's new IR laws came into force.

And communications giant Telstra has seized on the laws to ban union officials from worksites where workers are on individual contracts.

The three workers at Altona company InstallEx were told they were redundant but could return as casuals or contract staff.

Under WorkChoices, they can't argue the sackings were unfair.

Company director Miles Williams said the decision had nothing to do with the new laws.

``It is simply a case of our accountant's advice that it is no longer financially viable for us to continue with employees on an enterprise bargaining agreement rate in domestic work," he said.

If the workers take up the new deal, they will lose sick leave, annual leave and public holidays, and will have to use their own vehicles instead of company cars.

They were given at least a day's notice and will get redundancy pay.

ACTU secretary **Greg Combet** said the three were among the first victims of the reforms.

``It is not a redundancy when the job is still there," he said.

Mr Combet said if they opted to return on the new conditions, they could lose about \$20,000 a year.

Telstra's move, planned at least four weeks ago, makes it one of the first major companies to impose the new union restrictions.

Telstra had 36,000 full-time employees last year, but it has announced plans to shed 12,000.

An internal memo seen by the Herald Sun reveals the company was primed

to seize on the changes well before they came into force.

It states there will be restrictions on unions' right of entry, including a total ban on unions entering a worksite where all employees are on workplace agreements, despite there being no restriction on being a union member on an AWA.

Opposition Leader Kim Beazley said the new system would cost nearly four million workers their protection from unfair dismissal.

But Prime Minister John Howard said the changes were necessary to maintain economic growth.

The Government also named its new Fair Pay Commission to set the minimum wage yesterday.

They are former clerks union state secretary Hugh Armstrong, businessman Mike O'Hagan, welfare group chief Patrick McClure and academic Prof Judith Sloan. It will be chaired by Prof Ian Harper.

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