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Wednesday 29 March 2006



Sackings as new work laws bite

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Publication: The Australian (004,Wed 29 Mar 2006)

Edition: 6 - NSW Country

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

A HOTEL housekeeper on Queensland's Sunshine Coast has been sacked with no right to claim unfair dismissal, as employers begin to take advantage of conditions abolished in the Howard Government's workplace laws introduced this week.

Mila Kent was sacked from her full-time job at Ramada Pelican Waters at Caloundra and put on the the hotel's roster as a casual worker.

After working for weekly pay of \$495, the hotel has now offered her \$18.43 an hour as a casual.

Ms Kent, 40, said she was distressed and believed she was a victim of new laws that allow employers with fewer than 100 staff to dismiss workers.

``I told my manager I can't eat, I can't sleep, I'm sick in the stomach," she said. ``I've been crying because this has never happened to me before."

Ms Kent said she could not cope financially without her full-time job because she and her husband, a taxi driver, needed regular income for their mortgage and to support their 13-year-old daughter.

She had lost her full-time entitlements and the casual work offered to her did not guarantee regular hours, she said.

Ms Kent left a 16-year job as a housekeeper at the Sheraton hotel at Noosa last year to join the newly opened Ramada, closer to her home in Caloundra.

She signed an Australian Workplace Agreement, the Howard Government's non-union individual contracts, as the hotel's condition of employment.

``Mila, we look forward to having you with us at Ramada Pelican Waters, and we hope that you will enjoy a rewarding and challenging career," general manager David Brill told Ms Kent in a letter attached to her contract.

Last week, Mr Brill gave Ms Kent a letter saying her full-time position was ``no longer available at this time" because of adverse trading conditions. He offered her casual work ``as per the AWA signed by yourself".

ACTU secretary **Greg Combet** said employers would act more aggressively under new laws and switch more people from full-time to casual work.

``I think we will see a lot of that because you can be terminated and there's nothing to stop you being offered work on inferior rates of pay," he said.

``People will be offered work as casuals, or as independent contractors, work where they have an ABN number and do their own superannuation."

Mr Brill did not return The Australian's call yesterday.

Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews yesterday ridiculed Mr Combet over another case after the **ACTU** leader claimed an employer had exploited three carpenters by sacking them and re-employing them as casuals.

Accusing Mr Combet in parliament of ``vile rhetoric", he said the workers at InstallEx in Melbourne were made redundant because of a downturn.

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