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**Monday 01 May 2006**

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## The Sydney Morning Herald

# Watchdog steps in after young worker's job downgraded

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Publication: Sydney Morning Herald (3,Mon 01 May 2006)  
Edition: First  
Keywords: **ACTU (2),Sharan (1),Burrow (1)**

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THE Federal Government's industrial relations watchdog will investigate the case of a young Sydney computer technician who was pushed from full-time employment to become a casual.

The director of the Office of Workplace Services, Nick Wilson, said yesterday that if the case of Julian McAlpine, 21, was as cut-and-dried as claimed, "it clearly amounts to a breach of the law".

The office will begin its investigation today after the Herald reported at the weekend that Mr McAlpine's employment status was downgraded by his boss, Andrew Tuft, owner of ICP Electronics Australia.

In early April, he was shifted from permanent full-time to casual employment, with no casual loading to compensate for the loss of full-time entitlements such as leave and paid public holidays.

Mr McAlpine maintained yesterday he was a victim of the Government's new industrial relations laws. He had never heard of the new watchdog but said its decision to investigate his case was "excellent".

Mr McAlpine is still with the company but, this week, has been asked to come in for only one day, on Friday. "I think he wants me to quit," he said of Mr Tuft.

Mr Tuft said the decision was unrelated to the new laws but based on his company going through a lean period.

Mr Wilson said that if Mr McAlpine's claims were proved, Mr Tuft faced two possible breaches. It was illegal under the laws to move a worker from full-time to casual to avoid protections available under the award. In addition, workers shifted to casual status were entitled to loading to compensate for lost entitlements.

Meanwhile, the **ACTU** yesterday accused the peak employer group, Australian Business Limited, of encouraging bosses to blame the Government to salve worker anger over the new laws.

The **ACTU** president, **Sharan Burrow**, has seized on a paper published by WorkplaceInfo, an internet subscriber service owned by ABL, which advises bosses how to explain the changes to staff.

" 'Blame the Government' will be a popular strategy," it says. "If an entitlement has been removed by law, tell employees that you had no option but to get rid of it, because that is what the law required you to do."

Ms Burrow said the strategy was understandable but disingenuous. "It's basically use the laws to screw your staff, don't cop any responsibility, blame the Government," she said.

ABL said the views expressed on WorkplaceInfo were "absolutely not" those of ABL. "It's a subscription service which has its own independent editorial policy," said a spokesman, Paul Ritchie.

Caption :PHOTO: Julian McAlpine ... investigation.

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