



Individual pay deals come off second best

By Nick O'Malley, Jessica Irvine and David Humphries

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The majority of workers on individual contracts being pushed by the Federal Government in its workplace reforms are worse off than those on collective agreements, a Bureau of Statistics report has shown.

Another survey found the vast majority of businesses had no plans to hire new staff when unfair dismissal laws were scrapped for companies with up to 100 staff. It appears to undermine Government claims that the move will create 70,000 jobs.

The Dun and Bradstreet survey found more than 80 per cent of businesses expected the changes to have "little or no impact" on their plans to employ new staff.

The bureau's social trends report, released yesterday, showed non-managerial adult employees on collective agreements earned an average \$24.10 an hour, compared with \$23.30 for those on individual contracts.

Those dependent on awards earned an average \$16.70 an hour. The report found women were more likely to fall into this category and that the gap between men's and women's earnings had widened in the past decade.

Women working full-time earned just 92 per cent as much as men, or \$2 less per hour worked, the report found.

The federal Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, told an ACTU executive meeting yesterday that the Prime Minister, John Howard, had "let the cat out of the bag" in his defence of workplace reforms. By mentioning the need to increase productivity in the face of the economic rise of India and China, Mr Howard had revealed he wanted to massively drive down the pay and conditions of Australian workers.

The ACTU secretary, Greg Combet, said the executive meeting had discussed strategies to be used in the campaign against the changes over the next six months. These included possible demonstrations to mark the passage of the legislation through the Senate.

He said the ACTU had yet to commit its entire advertising war chest. The unions' TV and radio advertising campaign against the changes would continue until the next federal election.

Employers, meanwhile, have begun lobbying church leaders who have voiced concern about industrial relations changes.

The chief executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Peter Hendy, revealed yesterday he had written to the heads of the Catholic, Anglican and Uniting churches, as well as the National Council of Churches, seeking meetings to put the case for industrial reform.

But the chamber said it would not finance an advertising campaign "at this stage" to counter the ACTU.

Mr Hendy said the public debate needed more input from Government but "we're not going into an advertising campaign" because "we believe that the strength of our arguments, the use of existing media, the use of mail-outs and talking directly to important influential decision-makers will help win the case".

He said the Dun and Bradstreet survey, showing four out of five businesses did not believe the IR changes would lead them to employ more staff, was consistent with chamber research. But that was not an argument against Mr Howard's claim that the package would create jobs.

Academics and bureaucrats will discuss the changes today at a conference in Sydney hosted by the NSW Office of Industrial Relations.

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