

# Pell warns on curtailing unions

## Push for teaching of intelligent design, tougher syllabus

By **MISHA SCHUBERT**  
and **JASON KOUTSOUKIS**  
CANBERRA

MOVES to curb trade union power have "gone a bit too far", Australia's most senior Catholic has warned, arguing that strong unions are needed to take on powerful multinational companies.

As the Howard Government races to draft laws enacting its controversial workplace relations overhaul, Catholic Cardinal George Pell yesterday spoke out against any further dilution of union power in industrial negotiation.

In an address to the National Press Club in Canberra, Cardinal Pell also:

- Endorsed the teaching of intelligent design alongside the theory of evolution in schools.
- Slammed former Labor leader Mark Latham's diaries as a "sad, self-obsessed book".
- Attacked the ALP's schools' policy.
- Dismissed the Family First Party as a beneficiary of an ALP preference deal.
- Criticised state school syllabuses for teaching films, magazines, advertisements and even road signs but abandoning great works of English literature.

Cardinal Pell said that while some unions and their leaders may have abused their power from time to time, Catholic tradition would not support a further weakening of unions, but rather "a modest strengthening" of their position.

"Some of these trans-national corporations are very, very powerful indeed and I think we need strong and effective and humane and altruistic unions to continue to dialogue with these people," he said.

"I am certainly not supportive of a radical rethink of the unions. I think that's gone far enough, you might even argue it's gone a bit too far."



**Pell: Australia needs strong, effective and humane unions.**

As the Government softened its welfare-to-work package yesterday, Cardinal Pell said he was concerned at plans to cut welfare payments for eight weeks if a job seeker failed to turn up for interviews three times in a year.

He said the "pretty tough" rule would force family, friends and charities to help support people during their payment suspension.

**Cardinal Pell said that Catholic tradition would not support a further weakening of unions.**

But Employment and Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews, a devout Catholic, said the move would help ensure people met their obligations to look for work in return for taxpayer support.

Part of yesterday's changes included those with extra responsibilities — such as foster carers, those with large families, home schoolers and people with a sick or disabled child — being exempted from new rules

forcing them to look for a job.

Cardinal Pell said the Family First party, which had a senator from Victoria elected at the last federal election, was not a national phenomenon. "They only arrived there because of an unusual exchange of preferences," Cardinal Pell said.

Federal Labor's education policy at the last election, which proposed redistributing funding away from wealthy private schools to less well-off schools, was unacceptable and guaranteed to provoke division, he said.

Cardinal Pell said that the result of schools shifting their focus away from authors such as Bronte, Orwell and Dickens and the Romantic and Great War poets was to leave children morally rudderless and deny them a philosophical foundation for adhering to humanist values.

Cardinal Pell, the former archbishop of Melbourne who is now the Archbishop of Sydney, said he had no problem with intelligent design being taught in schools.

Intelligent design suggests that certain features of the universe and living things are so complex that they must be the result of an intelligent cause or agent, not an undirected process such as natural selection.

"We don't want a simple dogmatic teaching of evolution, we would want (teachers) to talk about the enormous, significant problems in the evolutionary history and these are freely admitted by people who study these things and they say they don't have an answer," he said.

Last month, federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson said that parents should be able to choose whether their children were taught intelligent design.

Cardinal Pell described Swan Barry Hall's punch to St Kilda's Matt Maguire as a "playful little nudge" and said he would be barracking for Sydney in Saturday's grand final.