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## **Few need PM's help on illegal sackings**

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JOHN Howard has admitted that almost no one would benefit from his offer to provide \$4000 worth of government legal advice to employees of small businesses who claimed unlawful dismissal.

The Prime Minister yesterday announced a scheme to provide financial help in hardship cases for people employed by firms with fewer than 100 employees who had an arguable case that they had been unlawfully sacked.

But he conceded the assistance would be extremely limited, as it was revealed just five cases of unlawful dismissal had been decided by the Federal Court over the past three years.

Only 147 such cases have been referred to the court since 1996.

Under Mr Howard's workplace reforms to be introduced into parliament next month, businesses with up to 100 employees are to be exempted from unfair dismissal claims heard by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The move is meant to be an incentive for them to hire more staff.

But workers in these firms will still retain the right to claim "unlawful dismissal" in the Federal Court, on grounds of discrimination, if they are sacked because of family responsibilities, disability, gender, race, religious beliefs or political associations.

Mr Howard conceded: "There are not a large number of (unlawful termination cases), because very few people these days would be so foolish as to sack somebody on the grounds of their race or their background, or their membership of an industrial organisation."

In a speech in Perth, he defended his plan to water down unfair dismissal laws. But **ACTU** secretary **Greg Combet** branded his offer to provide help "a con".

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