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## Strikes banned for five years

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New projects and industries will be quarantined from **industrial** action for five years, instead of the previously proposed one, under late changes expected in the Government's new **workplace** legislation.

Penalties for employers and workers who fail in their legal obligation to give notice of **industrial** disputes are likely to jump. The current maximum penalty is \$33,000 for companies and unions and \$6600 for individuals.

On the eve of the legislation's introduction to Parliament today, nearly six months after it was outlined, the **Workplace** Relations Minister, **Kevin Andrews**, said he would take advice on extending the **industrial** action quarantine under so-called "greenfields" agreements.

Wilson Tuckey, a champion of the extension and a member of the Government's backbench committee on the proposed legislation, said he had been told the amendment was being seriously considered.

"Setting 12-month agreements for building big **industrial** and commercial projects is just asking for trouble because it's the oldest trick in the book for unions to pull the plug on co-operation just when the project gets to a critical stage," Mr Tuckey said.

According to the Government's promotional literature, when a greenfields agreement expires it may be followed by properly notified **industrial** action "in support of a new agreement".

Coalition MPs also want to make it compulsory for project managers to advise the **Industrial** Relations Commission of **industrial** disputes.

That way, the MPs say, unions would not be able to blame employers for notifying debilitating disputes and then retaliate against them.

A meeting yesterday of Coalition MPs strongly endorsed the principles of the legislation, although hardly any of them have seen it.

The legislation's 700 pages - 200 of which deal only with transition arrangements - will replace 2000 pages of existing legislation, Mr Andrews said. After transition, the law would take up only a quarter of its current

volume.

Parliament will have just one day to examine the details of the legislation before debate begins tomorrow.

The Prime Minister, **John Howard**, told yesterday's meeting that the changes were the key to jobs growth and Australia's economic future and that it was important the changes became law this year.

Several Coalition MPs told the Herald they were keenly awaiting the details because they would be better equipped to respond to **union** campaigns against the changes.

They said they had been left in their electorates with little more than the rationale and broad applications of the proposed system to challenge voters' worries.

Their opponents had exploited public concerns about a future made less certain by the absence of detail, they said.

The Government's saturation advertising of its package has been widely disparaged on the backbench.

Like Mr Tuckey, the NSW MP Gary Nairn said the legislation did not contain surprises. "It's a big piece of legislation because it's a rewrite of **industrial** relations," said Mr Nairn, who is parliamentary secretary to Mr Howard. "But the principles already enunciated are accurately reflected."

The legislation seems to have the necessary Coalition support to pass the Senate, where it will be subjected to more detailed scrutiny, thanks largely to two weeks of committee investigation there.

The legislation seeks to collapse six **industrial** relations systems into a single national system and to restrict the range of minimum conditions to four items - annual leave, personal or carers leave (including sick leave), parental leave (including maternity leave) and a weekly maximum of 38 hours averaged over the whole year.

A minimum wage will be set by the Australian Fair Pay Commission, modelled on research and analysis rather than adversarial negotiating.

The Opposition **workplace** relations spokesman, **Stephen Smith**, said yesterday the changes would lead to slashed wages and the stripping of entitlements.

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