

Joyce worried over 'operational' firing

NATIONALS senator Barnaby Joyce is concerned by the Howard Government's industrial relations bill because it allows employers to sack workers more easily.

The Queenslander, who has blocked government legislation in the past, said last night he was worried the changes would encourage businesses to restructure their operations just to dismiss unwanted staff.

The laws introduced into the parliament exempt businesses with fewer than 100 employees from the unfair dismissal laws.

Senator Joyce said he had received an assurance from the Government that it would be illegal to sack full-time employees and replace them with contract labour using the new industrial provisions allowing "operational

reasons" for dismissals. "I had a query," he said. "If I had 79 employees and I sacked them all and re-employed people on contracts, would it be illegal?"

"And the answer I got was yes. If they lied, it's on their heads."

Senator Joyce's comments suggest he could vote to block the historic legislation.

He made the remarks after listening to evidence on the bill before a Senate estimates hearing last night.

But Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews defended the decision to introduce "operational reasons" to sack workers, saying it was meant to avoid "double dipping" by people who got redundancy payments.

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