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`Complex' IR laws get six-year shelf life

Author: Brad Norington

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JOHN Howard's new workplace laws could have a short life -- possibly six years -- because their ``mind-boggling detail" will make them unworkable.

Legal academic Ron McCallum predicted the laws would be replaced as employers, workers and unions struggle with ``a huge wall of law" running to 1700 pages.

``It is this very legal edifice which carries some of the seeds of its destruction," he told the NSW Law Society.

The dean of law and professor of industrial law at the University of Sydney said employers would resent being told what they could and could not include in workplace agreements, under new ``prohibited content" rules.

Employers will sidestep the laws and make their own private arrangements, he said.

``When laws are overly prescriptive, people usually bypass them in one form or another," he said.

Delivering the Julian Small lecture last week, Professor McCallum predicted the Howard Government would be engulfed by legal battles because its workplace laws had failed to consider international conventions on freedom of association signed by Australia in 1973.

A number of provisions were hurriedly drafted and likely to be declared invalid, he warned.

American employers would rightfully regard a list of prohibited bargaining matters imposed in Australia as a gross interference with their liberty to contract, he said.

The criticisms match those of Coalition supporters. The Institute of Public Affairs and the HR Nicholls Society, backed by business, have urged

Canberra to simplify the laws.

Workplace Relations Minister **Kevin Andrews** yesterday declined to comment on Professor McCallum's arguments. But a spokesman said: ``It's well-known that Ron McCallum is more comfortable in the company of the IR Club of the 1970s and 1980s, and we'd be staggered if he said anything different."

Professor McCallum has advised Labor governments in Victoria and NSW. However, his legal analysis is widely respected across politics.

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