



The changes to be made to workplace relations laws in Australia will worsen wages, conditions and remove many employment rights for women.

THESE LAWS ARE A MASSIVE ATTACK ON THE RIGHTS OF ALL WORKERS, PARTICULARLY WOMEN AND THE LOW PAID.

## What you can do Protest!

The changes proposed by Howard will set back the gains made over the last 30 years by Australia's working women.

To let the Government know how you feel, write to or email:

### **Kay Patterson**

Minister for Women's Issues  
Shop 3, 10-40 Burwood Highway,  
Burwood East VIC 3151  
senator.kcpatterson@aph.gov.au

### **Pru Goward**

Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner  
GPO Box 5128, Sydney NSW 2001  
complaints@humanrights.gov.au

### **John Howard**

Prime Minister  
GPO Box 59, Sydney NSW 2001  
Go to: [www.pm.gov.au/email.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/email.cfm)

### **Kevin Andrews**

Minister for Employment & Workplace Relations  
PO Box 124, Doncaster VIC 3108  
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Endorsed by

Women's Electoral Lobby Australia  
Business and Professional Women NSW Branch  
Australian Women's Health Network

# WOMEN & LOW PAID

**big losers under Howard's way**



## REMOVAL OF INDEPENDENT UMPIRE

### SETTING A FAIR WAGE

The new laws remove the setting of a fair minimum wage from the independent umpire, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, and place it in the hands of a government appointed, so called Fair Pay Commission. This provides for an adjustment to the single adult minimum and junior wage on a periodic basis. We ask, does this mean every one, two, five, ten years or when the Government so decides?

*This effectively freezes increases in the minimum wage.* The Howard Government has consistently argued against a decent increase in minimum wages. The Minimum Wage is currently \$467.00. The Minister for Workplace Relations, Kevin Andrews, has stated that he thinks this is \$70 above what it should be.

The Australian Industrial Relations Commission has provided a fairer outcome for lower wage workers, many of whom are women. Howard wants a similar industrial relations system to the United States where the minimum rate is only 36% of average weekly earnings — in Australia it is 65%. In the US 25% of workers are low paid by OECD standards and women make up 32% of low wage workers. In Australia, where the independent umpire has set minimum wages, the figure is much lower at 13% of women workers.

## AWARD PROTECTIONS GONE

The Howard laws will effectively gut the award system. Employers will be able to force many workers onto individual contracts, known as Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) with only five minimum employment standards: a minimum rate of pay, annual leave, unpaid personal leave, unpaid parental leave and maximum ordinary hours.

By removing the No Disadvantage Test individual contracts will no longer be measured against award standards. Workers forced onto individual contracts now risk having all their award entitlements reduced to these five minimums.

Workers who are able to remain under the award system will have their wage rates set by the new Fair Pay Commission rather than the independent Australian Industrial Relations Commission. These workers will have a number of current conditions removed from their awards. Classification structures in awards are also under threat from a planned government review to 'rationalise' awards and classification structures. Classification structures are the way in which tribunals have set rates of pay for different types of work. It is only recently that in areas where a large number of women work that classification structures in awards have been revised to gain pay equity and recognise the proper value of their work.

## NO UNFAIR DISMISSAL PROTECTION IN WORKPLACES WITH UNDER 100 EMPLOYEES

This broad exemption removes unfair dismissal rights for almost 90 per cent of the private sector workforce. Many women work in workplaces with less than 100 employees. *They will lose their protection from unfair dismissal.*

## ATTACK ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Howard's laws will make it difficult for workers and their unions to organise and bargain a collective agreement. Individual contracts will be able to undercut collective agreements and awards and unions will lose many rights to enter workplaces to speak to workers, members and to enforce proper workplace standards and conditions.

## A UNITARY INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SYSTEM

The Commonwealth, in a massive grab to enforce its downgrading of employment rights, intends to abolish the state industrial tribunals and replace them with a weakened Australian Industrial Relations Commission which will administer a watered down award system.

Removal of the state tribunals will deny many women the award protection that is currently provided by state tribunals. These include the operation of common rule awards that apply throughout an industry workforce, entitlements and protections for casual workers, and equal remuneration standards that are superior to those currently available under the federal Workplace Relations Act. Penalty rates, allowances, superannuation, paid maternity leave, paid family and carer's leave and redundancy pay are now at risk

## WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN WORKERS IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY?

After years of fighting for equality, women stand to lose advances in pay equity, employment rights such as paid maternity leave, superannuation, penalty rates for casual work, work and family entitlements, unfair dismissal rights, and an independent way of setting a fair minimum wage. The Government argues that it is giving workers freedom and flexibility. By taking away rights women will lose wages and conditions, freedom and flexibility.

The progress that Australian women have made in their pursuit of equality and rights in the workforce is now at risk!

