



New Labor contracts as bad as AWAs, says union

Workers are 'losing benefits'

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LABOR'S much-vaunted individual contracts have proved to be as bad for employees as the agreements they replaced, the controversial Australian Workplace Agreements.

Australian Services Union branch secretary Ingrid Stitt said there was disenchantment with the new contracts, which were introduced earlier this year as part of a transitional bill to stop new AWAs being created.

"The transition while on paper looks like an improvement, in practice it's totally ineffective," she said.

"(The new agreements) are a wolf in sheep's clothing."

Ms Stitt's union is currently locked in a dispute with Toll Dnata, an airline services company, over the use of the new Individual Transitional Employment Arrangements.

About 200 customer service and check-in staff at Toll Dnata, including 50 in Melbourne, have in the past year been offered a

mix of AWAs and the new agreements.

The union says the deals cut pay and allowances by at least \$5000 a year when compared to the award. Toll declined to comment yesterday.

Ms Stitt's comments add to an increasing disquiet from unions about the pace of the Government's moves to overhaul Australia's workplace laws. The Government is due to release its substantive bill later this year but the ACTU have pushed for a quicker pace, saying employers are still using WorkChoices to strip conditions and pay.

Ms Stitt said the first part of Labor's changes concerning the new individual contracts lacked teeth.

The new contracts — designed to act as a bridge for employers who had used AWAs previously — are to expire at the end of next year, just before Labor's new workplace system is due to start.

She said the agreements offered to Toll Dnata staff did not offer penalty rates, higher duties pay or travel allowances.

Ms Stitt said the union have taken the case to the Workplace Authority but have waited nearly six months to see if some of the new agreements passed the fairness test. The rules were ineffective, she said.

A spokeswoman for Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard said she was not allowed to speak on particular agreements but said any agreement must pass a no-disadvantage test that protects basic pay and conditions contained in the relevant award.

Meanwhile, Ms Gillard has expressed concern that a draft proposal by the Industrial Relations Commission to expand redundancy pay to small businesses with fewer than 15 employees will add to costs for the sector.

The Government is set to oppose the draft rules in a submission to the commission but ACTU secretary Jeff Lawrence said small business employees must have access to redundancy pay as it was an important workplace right.

By: *Senator Fisher*
Education, Employment & Workplace
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