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— Adrian O’Connell

Cabinet submission leaked

New bid

to crush

PS union

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The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Tony Abbott, is taking new steps to crush unionism in the Australian Public Service.

A confidential Cabinet submission obtained by *The Canberra Times* reveals Mr Abbott is planning to force public servants to sign non-union, individual Australian Workplace Agreements.

He also wants to ban union-based certified agreements.

The submission deplors the low use of AWAs and the declining level of non-union agreements in the Public Service.

The measures will be seen partly as payback for his own department staff, who have insisted on a union-based agreement and will vote on it this week.

The Community and Public Sector Union said the moves would damage the integrity of the Public Service and be an attack on public servants’ freedom of choice.

The Cabinet submission said the Government as employer had fallen noticeably behind other industry sectors in workplace reform.

It blasted departments and agencies for their conservative approach, saying many were reluctant to use AWAs because of the strength of union reaction, opposition from their own managers and the perceived administrative burden.

It said the Government must practise what it preaches if it

wanted the private sector to actively pursue workplace reform.

It recommends that:

- Individual AWAs be compulsory for all new public servants.
- All jobs be advertised on the basis that the successful applicant be offered an AWA.
- All promotions and transfers resulting from advertised vacancies be contingent on AWAs.
- Agency heads must offer AWAs to all employees.
- All certified agreements must be negotiated directly with employees under the non-union Section 170LK of the Workplace Relations Act.
- Pay increases must be kept in line with wage movements in the wider community.
- The portfolio minister must approve certified agreements negotiated by statutory authorities.
- Agreements must be simple and flexible, supporting agency productivity and performance.
- The Public Service Commissioner, Andrew Podger, be

asked to amend public-service directions to make promotions and transfers contingent on AWAs.

However, it admitted Mr Podger, as a statutory officer, could not be compelled to amend them and they could also be overturned by Parliament.

The National Secretary of the CPSU, Adrian O’Connell, said yesterday that some of the recommendations might contravene the Government’s own financial management legislation and would also be an attack on the merit principle.

“If a person was given a job because he or she was prepared to accept an AWA but another candidate was not, it would be a recipe for disaster,” he said.

AWAs and non-union agreements had been available as a choice since 1996. “They are educated, intelligent and generally sophisticated enough to know what’s in their own best interests. If they have made the choice to have agreements negotiated by the CPSU, then that is their choice.

“If Tony Abbott is now saying he is going to withdraw that choice, which is available to others in the workforce, that completely contradicts his own position. It’s a discredited agenda that has already failed in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland and has caused major damage to those public sectors.”

The submission said only 5 per cent of the Australian Public Service had taken up AWAs, with less than 1 per cent below senior executive level.

Non-union agreements had dropped from 44 per cent to 35 per cent.