UnitingJustice AUSTRALIA

call to action June 2006

WORKCHOICES

advocating justice for working Australians

The Federal Government recently introduced extensive changes to the industrial relations system in Australia. The WorkChoices legislation follows a decade of reforms to the Federal system that have taken a heavy toll on low paid workers.

The Uniting Church in Australia has a strong commitment to social and economic justice. We believe that these laws will significantly contribute to the growth of waged poverty and inequity.

WorkChoices abolishes many workers' rights to challenge unfair dismissal. It diminishes the role of the independent Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) in favour of the Government-appointed Fair Pay Commission. Harsh penalties have been put into place to discourage traditional trade union activities. Under WorkChoices, minimum award conditions including penalty rates and overtime payments can be done away with under an individual agreement, significantly reducing many employees' take-home pay and impacting heavily on low-paid workers.

The Uniting Church urges you to help influence the direction of policy

Write, **fax** or **send an email** to your Federal Member of Parliament asking that they support an independent industrial relations system that protects, supports and enhances all employees' entitlements. A list of MPs' contact details – by electorate – can be found at the following website: **http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/mi-elctr.asp**

Send a carbon copy to the Prime Minister.

Write to your local paper and **respond** to any talkback radio on the issue.

For more information, refer to the resources published on the UnitingJustice website – **http://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice**

The Uniting Church has called on the Government to rethink its industrial relations agenda.

All working people should have the right to appeal an unfair dismissal. While a common law remedy may be available through anti-discrimination bodies, these forums require employees to bear the cost of legal representation, making them less equitable than the current system. The Church is also concerned that the minimum wage should be set with reference to the needs of employees, and not by the profit-driven agenda of the market. UnitingJustice has called on the Government to actively protect the low paid and vulnerable. Employees' entitlements should be underpinned by independent legal processes, and not left to the discretion of employers who may be driven by concerns other than their employees' wellbeing.

If you think you might be affected by the changes:

Learn more about the proposals UnitingJustice has prepared several fact sheets on the upcoming industrial relations changes, which can be found on our website at - http://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice/transformingsociety/economicsforpeople/index.htm#info.

Learn about discrimination the Federal Government funds a number of agencies which protect and advance the right to discrimination-free employment. These include the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, which can be found at http://www.hreoc.gov.au/, and the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency, which can be found at http://www.eowa.gov.au/.

Investigate joining a trade union Trade unions can provide valuable support if something goes wrong, as well as representation and advice for negotiations of your wages and conditions. If you're not sure which union would best represent your interests, or you would like to know more, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) maintains a website dedicated to answering your questions - http://www.actu.asn.au/faqs/about_unions.html.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS ISSUE, visit our website http://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice/

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