

RECENT WORK OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

The Social Justice Committee of CLRI(NSW), in response to an invitation from Ms Jan Burnswoods MLC (Chair of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues) made a submission in May 2006 to the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues *Inquiry into the Impact of the WorkChoices Legislation*, which resulted in a report tabled in Parliament on November 23, 2006.

Fifty-two submissions were received and many witnesses called to give evidence to the Inquiry. The submission of CLRI(NSW) is referred to on page 66 of the Report and is quoted in part:

6.53 Given such evidence, the **Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes NSW** identified a certain irony in the Federal Government's advocacy of WorkChoices:

Irregular working hours, the inability to plan and the lack of support in determining pay and conditions have a huge impact on the security and stability of families and on the capacity of people to contribute to wider society. If, as the Federal Government frequently reiterates, we are about families and family values then any changes to industrial relations ought to be focused on supporting families and communities.

The Report makes nine recommendations:

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government call on the Federal Liberal/National Coalition Government to repeal the Workplace Relations (WorkChoices) Amendment Act 2005 immediately.

Recommendation 2

That the NSW Government, in consultation with other states and territories, investigate whether it should provide additional resources to the Anti-Discrimination Board and the courts – notably the Chief Industrial Magistrate's Court – to deal with unfair dismissal claims.

Recommendation 3

That the NSW Government establish an Office of the Workplace Rights Advocate, similar to that in Victoria, as an independent statutory body to assist employees, employers and independent contractors to negotiate pay and conditions under the new federal industrial relations system and to monitor unfair and illegal industrial practices.

Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government consider the provision of additional resources to the Office of Industrial Relations in order to boost its inspectorate and to enable the Office to provide advice and training seminars, and information and resource kits for community legal centres. The Committee encourages the Office to target training, information and support

to rural and regional New South Wales in order to increase the participation and skills of people living in these areas.

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government should consider developing a longitudinal study tracking wages and conditions of work in NSW, and consult with other states about achieving a common approach to this study.

Recommendation 6

That in establishing an Office of the Workplace Rights Advocate, as set out in Recommendation 3, the NSW Government ensure that the Office pays explicit attention to the needs of disadvantaged groups.

Recommendation 7

That in examining the provision of additional resources to the Office of Industrial Relations, as set out in Recommendation 4, the NSW Government specifically consider the needs of disadvantaged groups.

Recommendation 8

That in considering the development of a longitudinal study tracking wages and conditions in NSW, as set out in Recommendation 5, the NSW Government also consider the capacity to monitor effects specifically in relation to disadvantaged groups.

Recommendation 9

That the NSW Government call on the Federal Liberal/National Coalition Government to amend section 151(2) of the Workplace Relations Act 1996 to include people with a disability amongst the list of workers in a disadvantaged bargaining position.

The full Report may be found at <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/socialissues>