



CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN NEW SOUTH WALES CLRI (NSW)

ABN: 52 476 362 010
Member of Catholic Church Religious Group

Senator Steve Fielding
The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Dear Senator Fielding,

Again I write on behalf of the NSW Justice Committee of the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes CLRI(NSW) representing approximately 3,500 members and their associates in NSW. The Justice Committee is responsible for research, resourcing, reflection, advocacy and action in the areas of justice, peace, the environment, education and human rights.

Prior to the election of our present government the members of CLRI(NSW) participated in rallies, signed petitions, wrote to and met with politicians in regard to WorkChoices. The basis of our opposition to WorkChoices was found in Catholic Social Teaching which, for over 100 years, has clearly stated the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, supported the necessity of a strong union movement and vigorously denounced the exploitation of workers.

The proposed Fair Work Legislation is in response to a clear mandate given to the Rudd government by a majority of voters to do away with WorkChoices and we urge you to support it.

If your proposed right of entry provisions for businesses of less than 20 employees were accepted, 30 million Australian workers would be denied access to union assistance and advice. CLRI(NSW) is particularly concerned for unskilled, low paid, migrant and casual workers and more of these make up the majority of those employed in small businesses. These vulnerable workers often have difficulty accessing proper advice as to conditions and entitlements.

Evidence indicates that while most small business employers are fair and honourable, more breaches of awards and OH&S requirements occur in small businesses than in larger concerns. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that employees be protected from unsafe working conditions, harassment or exploitation. Denying unions access to businesses of under 20 employees is, in our view, discriminatory.

Unions have a very particular role in representing the concerns of workers and, in general, they only need to see the records of their members. However, occasionally it is necessary for them to check the records of non-union members when, for example, the union suspects that union members have been treated less favourably than non-union members.

A requirement of 72 hours' notice for union entry provides ample opportunity for an unscrupulous employer to cover up evidence of wrong doing.

Senator Fielding you are in an extraordinary position of power in the present parliament and you must grapple with the tensions which arise between your beliefs and those of the government. The members of CLRI(NSW) are in full support of the right of the cross-benchers to present their point of view, to negotiate and even to drive a hard bargain. However, what is of the utmost importance is the mandate given to the government by the majority of the Australian voters and if this is constantly obstructed in the Senate then democracy is the poorer.

Yours sincerely,

Libby Rogerson

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for CLRI(NSW)
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