

"Insecurity at work and NO social security MAKES us ALL insecure!"



UNIONSOLIDARITY

nothing to lose, everything to gain

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www.community.unionsolidarity.org

go to

What happens if you lose your job in a 'WorkChoices' world?

What is Community Sector Solidarity?

Community Sector Solidarity is a group of Union Solidarity. We are unionists, community and faith-based workers striving to challenge harsh welfare and workplace laws. Union Solidarity groups have sprung up all over Victoria, NSW and WA in response to the new work place laws. These groups aim to stand with Unions in the fight for our workplace rights. We put this pamphlet together because many of us do not feel free to take a public stand under fear of loss of funding or even the charitable status of our organisations

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Nobody likes 'WorkChoices'

There is near universal condemnation of 'WorkChoices' in the Australian community. In 2006, even Liberal Senator Nick Minchin stated that, "The fact is the great majority of the Australian people do not support what we are doing on industrial relations. They violently disagree".

Easier to get the sack

There is no doubt that employees face **greater insecurity** after 'WorkChoices'. Under 'WorkChoices' employers who employ up to and including 100 employees are exempt from unfair dismissal laws – the Victorian Office for the Workplace Rights Advocate says that **97%** of us are employed in these workplaces in Victoria. Last year the then Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews told the ABC that a small business employer can terminate a worker if they do not like them – for as little as a personality clash. There are limited safeguards in the area of unlawful discrimination but this kind of case is difficult, and potentially costly, to pursue (see the *where to go for help* section). The old system, which still applies if you are in a workplace with over 100 people, was much fairer and easy to access.

97% of Victorians cannot dispute their own sacking

Welfare to Work – a broken 'safety net'

Many Australians who strongly disagree with 'WorkChoices' are not aware of the consequences for those caught between radical work place laws and the social security changes brought in by the 'Welfare to Work', initiatives introduced in July 2006.

We feel that Welfare to Work opposes the central tenet of the Australian welfare system; providing a bit of dignity while people are in a rough patch, but Welfare to Work punishes those who are doing it tough and only gives the barest nod to support and training. Despite skills shortages in some areas, for every 1 job available there are up to 10 people who are looking for, or need more, work and the mismatch between available labour and the skilled jobs on offer. The new system makes it easier to push the long-term unemployed, sole parents and people with disabilities and force them into the brave new world of 'WorkChoices' where the people-friendly award system is effectively replaced with the scant 'Australian Fair Pay and Conditions Standard'. The Standard replaces the 'no disadvantage test' where you could not be asked to sign up to a job with conditions worse than the award. There

Welfare to work punishes those who are doing it tough already!

is now no guarantee for things that we used to take for granted like public holidays, meal breaks and overtime rates.

What happens if you are unlucky enough to be unemployed?

Under 'Welfare to Work' you must take a 'suitable' 'WorkChoices' job. There are limited safeguards e.g. you don't have to work for under the minimum wage, these jobs are 'unsuitable', but aside from this any job is fair game. What happens if you don't take a 'WorkChoices' job? You can potentially lose your social security payment for 8 weeks, even if the job demands you to work family unfriendly hours, for example on a Sunday, excludes you from Award conditions, and pays you the bare minimum. **Community Sector Solidarity is aware of a number of cases where unemployed workers on benefits have been effectively coerced into crossing picket lines, entering into AWAs and working in potentially unsafe worksites, at risk of being breached and automatically being suspended from their Centrelink benefit for 8 weeks.**

What happens if you take a 'WorkChoices' job and you receive an unfavourable Employer Separation Certificate from your previous employer? You can lose the right to social security for 8 weeks too. Media reports suggest that 60% of people lose their social security income for this reason.

If you are unemployed already, you have to jump through more hoops, like multiple assessments and interviews with various employment and other support service providers – and if you miss three appointments you can lose your payment for 8 weeks. Imagine if you have been unemployed and your savings are low or non-existent and you are suddenly facing **loss of all income for 8 weeks**. The Commonwealth Government claims that you can receive welfare payments if this happens to you if you are deemed 'vulnerable', but this only covers a minority of cases. Just this year the media covered the story of a pregnant woman who had her welfare payments cut off for eight weeks but was not given any extra financial help because she was not considered 'vulnerable'.

If any of these scenarios happen to you see the **where to go for help** section - at the end of this pamphlet.

**14,000 people
are expected to
lose payments**

A media report from March of this year states that more than 7000 unemployed people who have had their social security payments withdrawn for the **maximum** eight weeks in the past nine months have been denied case managers to help them survive. An estimated 14,000 are expected to lose payments for infringing Welfare-to-Work rules. Our communities are already suffering because of this injustice, because not only does the punishment flow to the individual job seeker there is a ripple effect through their families and on local businesses and communities.

What are the alternatives?

The decline of decent ongoing work pre-dates 'WorkChoices'. Many of us are trapped in contracted or casual jobs with little pay and no future. Young people would like to join a union – they just don't know how.

***We work for a living not
live for our work!***

Work is for people rather than the other way around.

- If our workplaces are decent and stable - our communities will be more decent and stable.
- Workers will have more time for families, friends and strengthening our communities rather than being stuck in the unpaid overtime rut.
- The social security system should be a stepping stone to decent work.
- Tax rates for low income earners need to be addressed.
- There needs to be greater funding for accessible tertiary education.
- There needs to be more support & incentives rather than punishment for the battlers.

**These are the real choices before us.
Union Solidarity is one place where we can take a stand.**

Where to go for help – there's a wealth of information out there...

- Community Sector Solidarity – community.unionsolidarity.org
- Job Watch – an employment rights centre to assist Victorian workers - www.job-watch.org.au
- Welfare Rights Unit (e.g. how to appeal unjust social security decisions) – www.welfarerights.org.au
- Join a Union – go to Unions Australia - <http://www.actu.asn.au/joinaunion/default.aspx>

UNION SOLIDARITY HAS ENDORSED THIS PAMPHLET