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**Federal IR Changes: Howard’s Christmas Present to Boeing**

The New South Wales Government should be applauded for its decision to refer the Boeing Williamstown dispute to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission.

I look forward to the careful consideration of this dispute by the NSW Industrial Relations Commission, and to a resolution which provides the fairness that the workers have been denied under John Howard’s existing federal system.

The Howard Government has failed to show any interest in resolving the dispute, despite continued pressure from the workers, their union, the Labor Party and the Hunter community. Instead it has now introduced new legislation which attempts to force all working people into accepting the lack of choice the Boeing workers have had at Williamstown.

The highly skilled aircraft engineers have now been locked out of their workplace for 156 days because they are seeking a collective agreement.

In the five months that these workers have been without a pay-check with which to pay their mortgages and feed their families, John Howard has spent \$55 million of taxpayers’ money advertising changes to the industrial relations system that will make the Boeing situation even more common.

Under legislation introduced to Federal Parliament this week, an employer can force its workers to sign individual contracts. These contracts will not contain the current protection of the “no-disadvantage test” against the relevant award - they will only have to include the minimum wage and four other basic conditions.

Workers like those at Boeing won’t just be locked out if they exercise their choice to negotiate a collective agreement - they’ll be sacked.

One has to wonder why Boeing has continually refused to negotiate with its workers at Williamstown for a collective agreement, despite similar agreements being in place at several of its other work-sites around Australia. One also has to wonder why John Howard wants to avoid a proper debate and pass these laws by the end of the year.

Perhaps its John Howard’s Christmas present to Boeing.

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