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NEWCASTLE PRIVATE HOSPITAL SACKINGS

The full force of John Howard's WorkChoices laws hit home today, with Newcastle Private Hospital sacking 8 workers and offering 36 workers "other positions".

John Howard's WorkChoices laws remove workers' protections and make it easier for them to be sacked. WorkChoices also allows workers to be sacked and then offered their jobs back on individual contracts for lower wages and fewer conditions. I have serious concerns that is what may happen to the 36 staff offered "other positions".

Reports to my office today suggest that staff were telephoned at their homes yesterday and asked to attend a meeting at 10.00am this morning. In the presence of security guards, the workers were locked in a boardroom while an announcement was made. The workers affected reportedly include kitchen staff, nurse administrators, receptionists, speech pathologists and social workers.

It is understood that some of the sackings were effective immediately, and some sacked workers were escorted off the premises on the spot. Staff have reported being asked to sign documents about their employment without union or legal advice. They have understandably reported feeling intimidated during this process.

We never like to see job losses in our town. But job losses conveyed in this way are even more worrying. This is not how a company should deal with its workers. If restructuring is necessary, there are ways to work issues out through consultation and negotiation between staff and management.

Giving someone less than 24 hours notice that their job is gone is not good enough.

Sadly, under WorkChoices, it would appear that these actions are legal, and that WorkChoices is being used at Newcastle Private to do exactly what John Howard designed it to do - remove fairness and job security from the workplace.

With healthcare vital to everyone in our region, the Hospital must also explain how it plans to keep up service levels to its patients while it is making these job cuts.

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