

CHECK OUT



CCJP
CATHOLICS IN COALITION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

August 2013

Election 2013 – Policy Positions: Industrial Relations

This is the 4th in a series of CCJP Check Outs on key Election Policy issues.



CCJP Introduction

This paper examines the industrial relations policies of the three major Australian political parties contesting the Federal Election to be held on 7th September 2013, the Australian Labor Party (the ALP), the Liberal/National Parties (the Coalition) and the Greens.

It should be noted that industrial relations policy by the major Australian political parties has only become important since 1983, when the ALP was elected as the Government.

Prior to this election, industrial relations reform was not a major policy platform for the Liberal Coalition, although there had been a traditional adversarial relationship and policy stance between the Liberal Coalition parties predecessors and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and its constituent trade unions.

This adversarial difference was particularly evident both before and during the 2007 Federal election, when the ACTU mounted a successful campaign against the then Coalition Government's Work Choices legislation and reforms introduced after the 2004 election.



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Should you wish to receive further **CHECK OUTS**, contact Cecily May, CCJP, PO Box A21, Enfield South, NSW 2133 or 9642 4507

Email: ccjp@bigpond.com / Web: www.ccjpoz.org

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The following is from the Coalition's policy statement on industrial relations:

- The Coalition's Policy to Improve the Fair Work Laws will:
- Keep and improve the Fair Work laws – including the independent umpire
- Re-establish the Australian Building and Construction Commission
- Provide better protection for members of Registered Organisations
- Provide practical help to small business workplaces
- Guarantee workers the right to access fair flexibility
- Create realistic timeframes for Greenfield agreements
- Ensure union right of entry provisions are sensible and fair
- Promote harmonious, sensible and productive enterprise bargaining
- Ensure the laws work for everyone and an independent review by the respected Productivity Commission will be undertaken
- Deliver a genuine paid parental leave scheme and lift female participation rates in Australian workplaces
- Ensure workplace bullying is comprehensively addressed
- Urgently review the Remuneration Tribunal for the trucking industry
- Implement many recommendations from the Fair Work Review Panel report
- Give underpaid workers a better deal.

It should be noted that the Coalition has been careful to distance itself from any mention of, or comparisons to, Work Choices in this statement. Also the statement, other than the re-establishment of the Australian Building Construction Commission and the previously announced parental leave scheme, does not detail how policy initiatives are to be delivered.

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The Greens have a very comprehensive industrial relations policy, which is far too lengthy to be included in this factsheet. It can be accessed very easily on the Greens web site. Key points include

- job security,
- better work-life balance,
- right to organize,
- a stronger IR umpire.

Summarised, the policy largely reflects the principles developed by the International Labour Organisation for the freedom of association and the rights of trade unions and their members. The policy also covers specific issues relating to Australia.

Again, like the Liberal Coalition's policy the Greens do not detail how they plan to implement a number of the policy initiatives.

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The ALP have not developed any new industrial relations policy initiatives for the 2013 election, relying on the ALP's National Platform adopted by the ALP National Conference in 2011.

Other than the recent decision by the Government to review the Fair Work Act, the current ALP industrial relations position is contained in Chapter 5 'Opportunity and Fairness for Working Families' on pp 91-104 of the document. This can also be viewed in detail at the ALP's web site.

It should be noted that on p.94 of this Chapter, the ALP sets out what the Government has achieved in the field of industrial relations, but is silent on future initiatives.