



## Higher Education, The Howard Government, & YOUR JOB

The re-election of the Howard Government with a majority in the Senate means that their full agenda proposed in 2003 is back on the table for the university sector. Unfortunately Higher Education has joined the waterfront and building industries as targets of the Howard Government's obsession with destroying unions.

In 2003, the Howard Government attempted to blackmail universities with \$404 million worth of funding conditional on Universities implementing Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) and attacking your right to collectively bargain (a recognised human right).

Some of these proposed changes included:

- Redundancy pay reduced to 8 weeks, from up to 60 weeks in some cases;
- Maternity leave down to as low as 9 weeks, from as high as 36 weeks;
- No restrictions on the use of casuals and fixed-term contract employees;
- Remove all restrictions on outsourcing;

and most importantly:

- Restrict the ability of staff and their union to collectively bargain.

We defeated these changes in 2003 thanks to the effective campaign run by the Union and our members culminating in the October 16 strike.

Minister Nelson and Minister Andrews have specifically mentioned AWAs as one of the first industrial relations reforms they would like to introduce.

### What are AWAs?

They are individual contracts between staff and the employer. The Union cannot automatically bargain on your behalf. This means that you may be alone as an employee and have to negotiate your pay and working conditions by yourself, without support and without the collective strength of all union members.

### Are AWAs better or worse than the Award or the Enterprise Agreement?

Unlike awards and Enterprise Agreements, in the vast majority of cases, AWAs are not examined by the "independent umpire" (i.e. the Industrial Relations Commission).

An AWA makes it possible for an employer and an individual to "contract out" an award or agreement and offer alternative conditions of employment.

## Does the AWA or the Enterprise Agreement Prevail?

The federal government is demanding that AWAs operate to the exclusion of the enterprise agreement.

## How successful has the federal government been in implementing AWAs?

Australian workers have been reluctant to take up AWAs with less than 2% out of the entire workforce under an AWA.

## Can't AWAs deliver benefits to individuals?

A study on AWAs from the University of Melbourne found:

- 95% of AWAs are focused on cost cutting avoiding regulation and expanding managerial control, and
- The AWAs process is not producing innovative work practices.
- Without having the collective strength of a union, it can be very difficult to get better conditions in your workplace agreement.

Furthermore, an AWA may be approved even if it is substandard, if it is in the interests of a business in 'crisis'. It is estimated that over 2% of all AWAs fall into this category.

## What about the issue of flexibility?

The evidence below shows that the only flexibilities that result from AWAs is downward flexibility on wages and conditions.

## How will these changes affects General Staff?

In the SMH on 5/5/03 Education Minister, Brendan Nelson was quoted as saying one of the goals of the introduction of AWAs was to "stop federal funds being used to supplement the entire workforce, arguing that only academics who can demonstrate 'superior performance' should be rewarded".

We must oppose the Federal Government's attacks on public education and workers' rights. This is why in 2005 the CPSU will be running a coordinated campaign of community and industrial action.

The CPSU will be holding information forums over the next coming months to outline the Howard Government's agenda, and what action we can take against it.

The CPSU is also facilitating action with the other higher education unions, student unions and the peak union bodies the ACTU and Unions NSW.

**For further information please contact your local branch committee, or phone:**

**CPSU (SPSF Group)  
Ph. 02 9290 1555  
1800 467 932 (outside Sydney)  
or email [cpsu@psa.asn.au](mailto:cpsu@psa.asn.au)**

**CPSU**  
the General Staff Union

## *Like to get involved?*

If you would like to help with the campaign against the Industrial Relations Reforms, please tick the following box/es and return to:

**Universities Team, CPSU, GPO Box 3365, Sydney 2001 or fax 9262 1623**

- Putting up leaflets in my local tea room or on local noticeboards
- Volunteering to be a union contact for my work area
- Attend a union information forum or event on this issue

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_