

PRESS RELEASE

November 23, 2006



Worklife: An Alliance of Community groups,
trade unionists and concerned citizens.
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WorkLife Community Alliance takes battle to suburban frontline – Sharan Burrow to speak in the suburbs!

Community alliance WorkLife will take the battle against the federal government's unfair work laws and radical welfare reforms to the suburban frontline at a public community forum in Mitchelton on Saturday, 25 November 2006.

The forum will provide an opportunity for community discussion and debate about the impact of a range of federal government laws on people's working and family lives including:

- the industrial relations laws (Workchoices);
- the new Welfare to Work regime;
- new laws regulating independent contractors; and
- repressive laws affecting building industry workers.

Guest speakers ACTU President Sharan Burrows, Wayne Sanderson from MS Australia and Josh Keech from the Young Workers' Advisory Service will share their first-hand experience of the impact which these laws are having on ordinary Australians, especially on young people.

In her address to a Monash University Seminar in October 2005, Sharan Burrow said: ****Ironically, these proposals are instead seeing working people encouraged to exercise their voice in opposition;- in workplaces, in their churches, in their communities****

WorkLife spokesperson Maggie May said a major aim of the forum was to enable people from the wider community to find out more about how these laws could affect them and their families in their daily lives.

“People will have the opportunity to share their own stories about the impact of these laws – the good and the bad, how they have coped with changes, and any suggestions they have for others,” she said.

“Even more importantly, this forum will provide an opportunity for us to as a community to explore ways we can collectively fight back against the creeping repressive and intimidatory changes that are being forced onto everyday people both in their working lives, and increasingly in their family lives as well – especially if they are being supported by social services.”

The forum is being organised by Worklife, with the assistance of trade unions, the local Picabeen Community Centre, members of surrounding church parishes, and local community groups.

See over for more background material:

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Sharan Burrow, ACTU:

„The failure of these laws is reflected in the problems the government is having selling them: They claim that they won't lower wages, but junior wages, trainees and workers with disabilities have to be competitive in the labour market. They claim everything is protected by law, but are freeing up workplaces to make things less regulated. They claim workers will be Ok, because labour is in short supply: but we need these changes because we need to attack unemployment.

These contradictions are evidence that the laws are not underpinned by a cohesive set of values or policy, but instead represent a short-sighted, opportunistic effort to shift the balance of power in our workplaces, and to fragment and weaken workers collective voices. Ironically, these proposals are instead seeing working people encouraged to exercise their voice in opposition;- in workplaces, in their churches, in their communities. This opposition will not be silenced by the passage of these laws, but will only get stronger and louder.“

http://www.actu.asn.au/work_rights/news/files/monash_uni_seminar_oct2005.doc

Some quotes on the Welfare to work laws

<http://www.acoss.org.au/News.aspx?displayID=99&articleID=1032>

ACOSS President Lin Hatfield Dodds said:

“ACOSS supports the goal of moving more people back into work but we are greatly concerned that lower payments and severe financial penalties are going to create unnecessary hardship“

Anglicare Australia Executive Director Sue Leppert said:

“Welfare-to-work should be about equality of opportunity. But when people who already face so many obstacles to finding and staying in jobs are punished further, where's the equality? Where's the opportunity? Workforce participation should encourage just that – and suspending income support payments will only make it harder to participate.”

Australian Federation of Disability Organisations CEO Maryanne Diamond said:

“Not only will people get less money each week, they'll also keep less if they work, and will be forced to run down their assets. No-one wants to work for \$2.27 an hour, but it's even worse for people with disability who have higher costs in the workforce because of their disability.”

Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations Acting Executive Officer Elena Rosenman said:

"Left with no income and no support for eight weeks, the Welfare to Work reforms will leave up to 14 000 Australians at imminent risk of homelessness. Already, each day 100,000 Australians are homeless. Each night, only 15 000 of these people find a bed in the homeless service system. Homeless assistance services turnaway 1 in every 2 people requesting support every day - the system simply cannot cope with any additional demand. These 14 000 Australians with no income and no support will have nowhere to go but the streets of our cities and towns."

Catholic Social Services Australia Executive Director Frank Quinlan said:

"A society can be judged by how it treats its most vulnerable and needy people. The good of individuals cannot be sacrificed, like a canary in a mine, in the pursuit of economic goals, no matter how noble.

“Participation in the workforce enhances people's dignity, and Catholic Social Services has long advocated for every person's right to secure, meaningful employment. But many people will need significant support in order to attain this goal. And we have to face the reality that some people may never reach this goal.”