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Our Brave New World

Government makes further industrial changes:

Many of you will be following the various media reports about the state government's industrial changes. A couple of key recent actions taken by the government are set out below.

Public service Directives

To date these Directives do not apply to our members.

The state government has issued two new public service "Directives" which override employees' rights and the government's obligations previously agreed to in certified agreements or prescribed in awards of the industrial commission. These Directives nullify or dilute obligations to provide unions with information about employees to be retrenched and abolish provisions, which provide employment security or restrict "contracting out".

These actions wipe out agreed provisions in currently operating certified agreements. It is of concern that the government can change existing agreements with a stroke of a pen and without employees having a vote.

These latest actions do not affect any Firefighter or Communication Officers agreements.

More changes to the Industrial Laws!

Members will recall that last month the state government passed new industrial laws, which tilt bargaining in the government's favour. The new laws made it harder for employees to take industrial action and easier for the government to influence the industrial commission about the government fiscal strategy.

The government has now introduced further industrial laws to allow more legal representation in the industrial commission. Traditionally, the industrial commission

has been an effective, low cost tribunal designed to make it easier for employees to raise their concerns without getting tied up in legal arguments.

The new changes allow for the QIRC to allow legal representation in any matter, but also introduce a specific right for legal representation in certain types of proceedings.

Legal representation will be automatically allowed in enterprise bargaining arbitrations. It looks like the government might be planning to hire lawyers to use in forthcoming arbitrations. No union or employees have pushed for these changes.

The government has once again changed the rules to suit itself. Our concern is that proceedings about employment matters can get stalled with technical legal arguments rather than focus on the practical issues.

Further, the government's new Bill allows automatic legal representation in dispute conferences. This is a radical departure from the long-standing practice of the tribunal where dispute conferences were used to develop practical alternatives to legal proceedings and settle disputes through conciliation.

The 'consultation' timelines for this Bill were extremely short. We had just a couple of days to consider these recent legal changes and provide a submission. There will not be a public hearing.

If you want to find out more about the most recent changes or read your union's submission, you can visit the parliamentary website <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-committees/committees/FAC/inquiries/current-inquiries/PublicServiceAmend>

John Oliver
State Secretary