



Brussels, 9 November 2005
TJ/em

The Right Honourable Tony Blair
Prime Minister
10, Downing Street
UK-SW1A 2AA LONDON

Via fax and post: +44 207 9250918

Dear Tony,

I am writing to you officially in your capacity as current President of the European Union's Council of Ministers to express the concern of the ETUC about the developing situation regarding trade union law in Australia. I am also writing, perhaps a little less officially, in view of the continuing close and enduring relations between Australia and the UK, which I know you value highly.

The Australian Government is, in our view, introducing repressive new industrial relations legislation, which will dramatically reduce the rights of workers to union representation, collective bargaining, minimum employment standards and protection from unfair dismissal. The independent Industrial Relations Commission will have virtually all its powers removed, except for its powers to stop unions taking industrial action. Minimum wages will in future be determined by a government appointed Commission which will set them on the basis of "competitiveness" but without regard for fairness and decent living standards. The system of "Awards" (which set out core terms and conditions of employment for different occupations and sectors) is being replaced by a system where the employer will have virtually total power to decide terms and conditions.

Key parts of the new laws include:

- Removing protection from unfair dismissal for all workers in workplaces employing less than 100 workers;
- Pushing workers onto individual employment contracts;
- Heavy restrictions on trade union activities, including on the right to talk with workers in their workplace;
- Imposing extremely narrow limits on the matters which can be the subject of collective bargaining. Unions can be fined \$33,000 if they seek to reach agreement with employers on unfair dismissal, union training leave, use of subcontractors and a range of other matters;
- Removal of the right to public holidays for many workers, and weakened provisions for annual leave;
- Employers will be able to decide unilaterally on annual leave bonuses, meal and rest breaks, overtime rates and other provisions for many workers, especially younger workers and those starting a new job;
- Protection for employees who refuse unsafe or unhealthy work will be reduced;
- The government will be able to stop industrial action if it decides the action is detrimental to the economy, and legal provisions concerning industrial action will be heavily biased in favour of employers.

EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
CONFEDERATION EUROPEENNE DES SYNDICATS

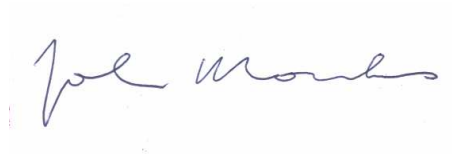
John Monks, General Secretary

Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5 • B - 1210 Bruxelles • Tel: +32 2 224 04 11
Fax: +32 2 224 04 54 / 55 • e-mail: etuc@etuc.org • www.etuc.org

I hope that you – and the President of the European Commission – will take an interest in this question and, while clearly respecting Australian democracy, find ways of alerting the Australian Government to the fact that the steps it is taking are raising concerns well beyond Australia and notably in Europe's trade unions. Even at this stage, we want to help our friends in Australia find agreed routes for progress and not embark on what will be a bruising and divisive set of measures.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the President of the European Commission and out of courtesy also to the Prime Minister of Australia and the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Monks". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

John Monks
General Secretary

cc: Mr José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission
The Hon John Howard MP, Prime Minister of Australia
Ms Sharan Burrow, President of ACTU