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Australia: Massive protests against government's industrial relations laws

Brussels 28 June 2006 (ICFTU OnLine): 300,000 Australian workers took to the streets in a series of nationwide rallies today to protest against the conservative government's new industrial relations laws. The laws impose heavy restrictions on workers' rights to union representation and give employers huge power to determine wages and conditions unilaterally.

ICFTU President Sharan Burrow, who is also President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, pointed to the government's own figures which show that the individual employment contracts which are being promoted by the government are stripping away working conditions and cutting incomes. Women and young workers are amongst those hardest-hit by the laws.

The new laws represent a further weakening of workers' rights, following on from previous legislation which has been criticised by the International Labour Organisation. The government now plans to go even further, with the introduction into parliament of new "independent contractor" laws designed to push down wages of contractors and employees alike.

"This government seems intent on returning industrial relations to the free-for-all of a century or more ago", said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder, adding that "a government that thinks pushing wages down and removing fundamental workers' rights is the way to secure prosperity and a sound economy for the future is deeply misguided".

Leading economic forecaster BIS Shrapnel has also joined the chorus of criticism of the government's approach, saying that it ignores the need to focus on productivity and skills, and that the government's legislation will do little to achieve either.

For further information, see: http://www.actu.asn.au/work_rights/

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 241 affiliated organizations in 156 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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