



Unions complain to international labour organisation about government attack on wages

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EXCLUSIVE



Fears: Thousands of workers protested in Sydney on Wednesday about cuts to penalty rates. *Photo: Jessica Hromas*

Public servants have lodged a complaint with the International Labour Organisation asking it to investigate the NSW government's actions in denying them the right to collectively bargain for wage increases.

The NSW Public Service Association, the Australian Council of Trade Unions and Community and Public Sector Union say the NSW government has not complied with international standards and has called on the ILO to investigate its conduct.

The complaint comes as unions rallied around the country on Wednesday to protest against the NSW and Federal government's privatisation of public assets and salary cuts.





Angry: Union members voiced their anti-Abbott and anti-Baird feelings outside NSW Parliament House on Wednesday. *Photo: Jessica Hromas*

Unions NSW secretary Mark Lennon said up to 10,000 workers had gathered outside NSW Parliament in Macquarie Street to send a "clear message to Prime Minister Tony Abbott and NSW Premier Mike Baird that they don't like their agenda on workplace relations and privatisation".

The Sydney protesters chanted slogans including "NSW not for sale" and "They say cut back, we say fight back".

Unions representing nurses, teachers, transport and electrical trade workers spoke out against the privatisation of the electricity network, hospitals and TAFE. They also protested against cuts to penalty rates.



March: Macquarie Street was blocked off on Wednesday as thousands protested the sale of state-owned assets. *Photo: Jessica Hromas*

Electrical Trades Union NSW secretary Steve Butler said the March 28 state election would provide an opportunity to "throw the mongrels out".

PSA general secretary Anne Gardiner said the government had breached international standards in preventing the state's 399,000 public servants to collectively bargain and to argue their case before an independent umpire. The state government has also capped salary increases at the below inflation rate of 2.5 per cent and slashed 5000 public sector jobs.

"The NSW government abused its power as a law maker to dictate terms and conditions for both its workforce and the independent umpire, the Industrial Relations Commission," Ms Gardiner said.

"The conventions that we are citing ensure that all workers have the right to come together and bargain for the issues that matter most to them. The NSW government's laws rig the game so that workers can only bargain on the terms that suit the employer.

"We expect government to set the standard for all employers with respect to the treatment of its workforce but the direction the NSW government is taking should be disturbing for all Australian workers."

ACTU President Ged Kearney said Australia was a member of the ILO and had ratified collective bargaining conventions.

"We have been forced to make this complaint because the actions of the NSW government do not comply with Australia's international obligations," Ms Kearney said.

The unions argue that since amending the Industrial Relations Act in 2011, the NSW government has breached work rights the international community is committed to upholding.

Sharan Burrow, who is general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, said international law convention does not envisage a government can define the scope of bargaining through legislation.

"Should the ILO supervisory system find the government in breach of international law the expectation is that the government would act to amend their own law and practice," she said.

ACTU secretary Dave Oliver said the rights of workers were under attack from the Abbott government and employers.

"The Coalition government is using the Productivity Commission inquiry into rights at work in an attempt to cut penalty rates, abolish the minimum wage, bring back unfair individual contracts and swing even more power to the employers," he said.

"Australians did not vote for cuts to Medicare, \$100,000 university degrees, slashing the public sector, abolishing the minimum wage, cuts to penalty rates and rights at work."

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