

Ads aim to tug on the mind's strings

Annabel Hepworth

The initial print advertisements in the Howard government's multimillion-dollar media blitz on its proposed workplace reforms have been lauded for providing plenty of factual detail, but derided as devoid of the heart-rending emotion that has made the union campaign so effective.

A lecturer in media and communications at the University of Melbourne, Sally Young, said she thought the ACTU's \$8 million campaign worked because it evoked fear and emotion.

The ads were similar in that regard to the Labor advertising campaign against John Hewson's Fightback! package in 1993.

But Dr Young said that if the federal government launched a television campaign, that would have more impact than its text-heavy full-page newspaper advertisements unveiled over the weekend.

The chairman of ad agency Grey Worldwide, Paul Gardner, said that while he had not studied the print ads in detail, at first blush the government was using pragmatism while the unions were using emotion.

"It looks like a lot of copy to go through. It's not the sort of thing that grabs my attention," Mr Gardner said of the government ads.

The ACTU campaign evoked some of the same emotions associated with the union campaign during the 1998 waterfront dispute.

"It's a very hard thing to take the emotion out of . . . it's about our way of life, our families," he said.

But it was hard to know whether emotion or pragmatism would ultimately win, he said.

Heavy on text, the government ads argue that the government would not slash wages, leave entitlements or strip workers of

their right to join a union.

"They are very copy-driven, and there is certainly a lot to read," Hamish McLennan, chief executive of advertising agency Young & Rubicam, said.

"But there's got to be no doubt that the general community feels there was a lot of confusion there, so I think from a government perspective, they've done the right thing in trying to put a clear message across with much detail."

Pollster Gary Morgan said he thought employers would read the federal government print ads.

He said that workers had been looking for more detail on the proposed reform.

"What the unions have done is successfully got through to the man in the street . . . that there are going

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to be changes to the IR [industrial relations] legislation . . . they've got that across, but no-one knows what they are," Mr Morgan said.

The government's campaign has come under attack from federal Labor, which criticised the ads as a waste of taxpayers' money, saying there was in fact nothing new in the information provided.

Yesterday, Prime Minister John Howard was talking down polls that found that two-thirds of voters had concerns about the overhaul of industrial relations.

He said on the Nine Network that when the New Zealand government undertook more radical IR reform, early polls showed high levels of opposition; but this situation turned around about 18 months after the reforms were introduced.

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Australian Government

MORE JOBS HIGHER WAGES A STRONGER ECONOMY

A STRONGER AUSTRALIA

Australians working together have helped to build a stronger economy and we have all benefited as a community.

Since 1996 real wages have increased by 14.7% and well over 1,600,000 new jobs have been created as the economy has grown and businesses – small, medium and large – have employed more staff.

New jobs and higher real wages are a direct result of a more efficient and growing economy. So too is our capacity to provide more health, education, social and community services.

To keep Australia strong, we must continue to improve the way we work together so that our country can compete more effectively in a global economy.

That's why we can't stand still. If we want Australian workers and their families to continue to enjoy the benefits of low unemployment, jobs growth, higher wages, low inflation and low interest rates – more needs to be done to keep the benefits flowing.

SENSIBLE AND FAIR CHANGES

It is important that you know what is, and isn't, being proposed and why.

In 1996 when changes were made to workplace relations some people expressed concern. Others tried to exploit those concerns. But the results speak for themselves. Australians clearly benefited with more jobs, higher wages and a stronger economy.

OUR PLAN TO SAFEGUARD WAGES AND CONDITIONS

- The Australian Government will protect the rights and conditions of Australian workers by legislation. Protected conditions include: 4 weeks annual leave, personal/carers leave, parental leave (including maternity leave), and a maximum number of 38 ordinary working hours per week.

KEY POINTS OF OUR PLAN

We are committed to continuing Australia's prosperity; to keep the strong economic benefits flowing to workers and their families; and to secure Australia's future.

- ✓ New safeguards for wages and conditions – guaranteed by Federal legislation.
- ✓ Encourage a cooperative approach in the workplace.
- ✓ Simpler, fairer and more flexible workplace agreements.
- ✓ Safeguard workers with a modern award system.
- ✓ Protect workers against unlawful dismissal.
- ✓ Preserve the right of workers to have a union negotiate a collective agreement if they wish.
- ✓ One set of national laws to cover workplace relations.

WHAT WE WON'T DO

- ✗ WE WON'T cut 4 weeks annual leave
- ✗ WE WON'T cut award wages
- ✗ WE WON'T abolish awards
- ✗ WE WON'T remove the right to join a union
- ✗ WE WON'T take away the right to strike
- ✗ WE WON'T outlaw union agreements

- Wage rates previously contained within awards will be set by the *Australian Fair Pay Commission*. These will not fall below the 2005 Safety Net Review decision and can be increased by the independent Commission. Awards will not be abolished.
- The Australian Government will continue to protect workers with a fair and sustainable safety net of wages and conditions. A new body – the *Australian Fair Pay Commission* – will set a single adult minimum wage on a periodic basis. It will also adjust minimum junior, training and disability wages, wage rates previously contained within awards and casual loadings.

OUR PLAN TO SAFEGUARD WORKERS WITH A MODERN AWARD SYSTEM

Awards will not be abolished. They will be updated so they continue to provide modern terms and conditions for those workers who choose not to have a workplace agreement.

OUR PLAN TO PROTECT AGAINST UNLAWFUL DISMISSAL

Workers will continue to be protected from unlawful termination, including dismissal on discriminatory grounds such as:

- family responsibilities,
- pregnancy,
- race and gender,
- union membership,
- political affiliations.

It will also remain unlawful for workers to be forced to sign an Australian Workplace Agreement (AWA) or be sacked for refusing to sign an AWA.

The Government's plan includes assistance to workers who have been unlawfully dismissed.

Laws introduced in 1993 which govern some aspects of unfair dismissal have not worked. They have cost jobs and continue to make employers reluctant to take on more workers. For this reason, businesses in the federal system with up to 100 employees will be exempted from those provisions to generate more jobs in small and medium businesses, the engine room of the Australian economy.

OUR PLAN FOR A SIMPLER AND EASIER PROCESS

The Government's plan is designed to make it simpler and easier for workers and employers to agree on working conditions.

Workers on AWAs currently earn 13% more than workers on certified agreements, and 100% more than workers on award rates.

All agreements will be required by law to meet the new test set out by the *Australian Fair Pay and Conditions Standard*.

THE AUSTRALIAN FAIR PAY AND CONDITIONS STANDARD

This new Standard will be the test for all agreements.

- It will safeguard workers rights and conditions.
- It will be based on minimum and award wages, as set by the *Australian Fair Pay Commission*, and the guaranteed minimum conditions of employment as set out in legislation.
- Workers and employers will be able to compare any proposed agreement against this new Standard.

THE AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMMISSION

To keep pace with our modern economy, the *Australian Industrial Relations Commission* will focus on dispute resolution and further simplification of awards.

A NATIONAL SYSTEM

Australia currently has six different workplace relations systems. Forcing employees and employers to work with this complexity is something we can no longer afford to do. Australia only needs one set of national laws to cover workplace relations.

OUR PLAN FOR SECURING AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE

By working together we will create more jobs, with higher wages in a stronger economy and secure the future for Australian workers and their families.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Go to www.workplace.gov.au/ourplan



• MORE JOBS • HIGHER WAGES • A STRONGER ECONOMY •