

Heat on tribunal to limit wage rise

Brad Norington
Samantha Maiden

THE Howard Government has increased pressure on the nation's wage-fixing tribunal to limit any rise in the minimum wage to \$11 a week, warning that it must take full account of last week's budget measures assisting low-income earners.

In a special post-budget submission, the Government yesterday cautioned the Australian Industrial Relations Commission against granting a rise that would cost jobs and lock the unemployed out of the labour market.

The submission, from Employment Minister Kevin Andrews, said the ACTU's claim for a \$26 increase in the minimum-wage safety net, if granted, would deny many people the opportunity to get a job.

Warning the bench to exercise moderation, he said the budget contained significant measures to help low-income households including tax cuts, a higher income threshold before withdrawal of family benefits and more generous income tests for unemployment benefits and parenting allowances.

Mr Andrews said the impact of the ACTU's claim would be felt most intensely on the fringes of the labour market "by people who are already the most vulnerable, including the long-term unemployed, the unskilled and the inexperienced".

At the same time, there was a risk that skill shortages could lead to inflationary wage increases across the economy.

The Government's warning comes as it prepares to axe the commission's traditional wage-fixing role, arguing that high annual increases granted in recent years have harmed the interests of the low-paid and unemployed.

A package of workplace reforms being finalised by John Howard and Mr Andrews for possible cabinet approval next Monday will establish a new Low Pay Commission required to apply tougher economic criteria before any minimum wage increase.

The reform package will also give employers the right to offer workers different deals for doing the same job, under a shake-up of laws governing non-union individual contracts called Australian Workplace Agreements.

For the first time, employers will be able to negotiate different AWAs even if they have the same level of experience and qualifications.

Mr Andrews confirmed last night that legislation previously blocked by the Senate to remove the bans on employers offering different AWAs to comparable workers would be reintroduced.

As long as workers were not discriminated against on the basis of age or sex, they could negotiate different deals to colleagues doing similar jobs.

A spokesman for Mr Andrews said: "These reforms will give employers and employees a better deal and more choices. Every AWA will have the ability to be tailor-made."

Australia bungled search: Manila

Cath Hart
Simon Kearney

THE Philippines embassy has accused Australia of bungling the search for wrongly deported Queensland Vivian Young.

The embassy broke its silence on the case yesterday with a statement that a request for help from Queensland police to the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration in Manila in 2003 had failed to mention that Ms Young, who also goes by the name of Alvarez and Solon, was

an Australian citizen. Government officials last night would not say if Philippine authorities were ever told Ms Young was an Australian citizen.

The embassy was also critical of the absence of any official approach to it by Australian authorities after they'd discovered Ms Young had been wrongly deported.

"The embassy believes that an official inquiry/request couched through the Philippines embassy in Canberra stating the true status of Ms Alvarez (Young) would have produced better and immediate

results," the statement said. The statement also reveals that the Australian embassy in Manila knew of Ms Young's deportation nearly four years ago, apparently contradicting claims by Foreign Minister Alexander Downer on May 16 that his department only learned of the case last month.

"The deportation proceeded on 20 July, 2001 with the Immigration (Department) informing the consulate that it had also contacted its embassy in Manila to assist in looking for a social welfare group that could take care of Ms Alvarez," the

embassy said. Opposition foreign affairs spokesman Kevin Rudd said yesterday the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade must have known of Ms Young's deportation after the immigration department's contact with the Australian embassy in Manila.

"In other words, if the Philippines embassy statement is correct, then Mr Downer's department knew of the (Young) case nearly four years before Mr Downer claimed was the case," Mr Rudd said.

The embassy intervention came as Sydney Catholic Archbishop George Pell said the Young case highlighted problems with the Government's immigration regime.

"I think the present government system is too tough," he said. "I've said this many times and I think this is another unfortunate example of that."

Ms Young was found last week in a Catholic hospice run by nuns in the city of Olongapo, north of Manila.

million-dollar compensation claim against the Australian government for her wrongful deportation.

The four-hour meeting at the central Manila apartment rented for Ms Young by the Australian Embassy followed another round of medical tests.

She is believed to be awaiting the results of a series of medical tests before she considers her next move.

The Australian has confirmed that the guards are paid by the Australian government and were employed after the family requested protection from the media.

The Australian Embassy in Manila is also providing cars and drivers for the family to move about the city, and is helping out with some day-to-day expenses.

Ms Young has not yet decided when or even if she wants to return home and has not requested to see her children in Queensland, *The Australian* has learned.



Disbelief: "Howard" and his son at their home in Sydney's west. They were separated for three days while Howard was held at the Villawood Detention Centre. Picture: Jeremy Piper

Man held despite passport pleas

Jeremy Roberts

A CHINESE-BORN Australian citizen was held in Villawood Detention Centre for three days, despite pleading with immigration officials that his passport was at his home.

Lawyers for the man — known as "Howard" — claim that instead of checking if the passport was at his home in the western Sydney suburb of Merrylands, the officials took him, his Chinese girlfriend and their three-year-old son to Villawood in 2002.

Howard's lawyer Nick McNally will meet federal government lawyers to discuss a coming civil action in the NSW Supreme Court for illegal detention.

The officials detained Howard after raiding the Granville home of his girlfriend, who was later deported to China.

Mr McNally said Howard, who has a limited understanding of English, was stunned when he realised the immigration officials did not believe he held a valid passport.

"He was astounded that the department would not travel the five to seven kilometres to collect his passport."

"This case basically shows that anybody who wasn't born here or who is not a white Anglo-Saxon has to carry their passport with them."

"If they don't, then they are going to be locked up."

Mr McNally said his client showed the officials a valid

driver's licence, Medicare card and proof of employment.

Howard was a student in Australia in 1989 when the Chinese Government put down the pro-democracy protest in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, leading to then prime minister Bob Hawke to invite Chinese students resident in Australia to stay.

Howard became an Australian citizen in 1997 and worked as a building contractor.

Howard and his son, then 3, who was born in Australia, were separated when he was forced to spend three nights in Villawood detention centre.

Mr McNally said it was only when a lawyer came to the detention centre with Howard's original citizenship documents that he was allowed to go home.

A spokesperson for the Immigration Department confirmed yesterday that it would defend the civil action but said any further comment was "inappropriate".

It is expected the department will claim that Howard did not state he held an Australian passport.

An immigration official is legally obliged to detain a person if there is reasonable cause to believe that that person is in Australia unlawfully.

The department would not comment on whether the case has been referred to the Palmer inquiry into Australians wrongly taken into immigration detention.

Zentai hid stint as enemy soldier

Nick Cater
Paige Taylor

ACCUSED war criminal Charles Zentai failed to disclose he had served in the German-allied Hungarian army when he entered Australia as a refugee after World War II.

Documents uncovered by *The Australian* show Mr Zentai listed his occupation as chauffeur on papers issued by the International Refugee Organisation. The papers allowed him to enter Australia with his wife and two young children under the Displaced Persons migration scheme in 1950.

Military service for a former enemy would have automatically disqualified him from entry to Australia under the rules of the scheme he disclosed it.

Two years earlier, the Hungarian government made an unsuccessful attempt to extradite Mr Zentai from the US-controlled zone in Germany to face trial for his alleged role in the bashing murder of a 19-year-old Jew, Peter Balazs, in November 1944.

In March this year, the Hungarian Government launched a fresh attempt to extradite Mr Zentai, an

83-year-old widower who lives in Perth. The case is being considered by Justice Minister Chris Ellison.

Mr Zentai's application to enter Australia as a displaced person was approved by the Australian Migration Office in Naples on February 3, 1950, four days before he boarded the SS Fairsea bound for Fremantle, the documents show.

On arrival in Fremantle, Mr Zentai signed an incoming passenger card using his Hungarian christian name Karoly and gave his occupation as farm hand, again making no mention of his military service.

Mr Zentai served in a transport division of the Hungarian army known as Fogatoltvonat Tan Osztaj.

He was the subject of a routine investigation by the Attorney-General's Department in 1957 when he applied to be naturalised as an Australian citizen.

recorded in this state against the subject's character".

War crimes historian and author Mark Aarons, whose documentary *Nazis in Australia* prompted the federal Government to establish the Special Investigations Unit in 1987, said Australia's record on Nazi war criminals was a scandal.

"Australia is the only Western country that took a significant number of Nazis but which has had no success at all in any prosecution of any type," he said. "By contrast, France, Britain, the US and Canada have all had not only successful prosecutions, but in many instances are continuing with prosecutions to this day."

The Special Investigations Unit found that hundreds of alleged Nazis had entered Australia. The unit was closed after five years and three failed attempts to prosecute alleged war criminals within Australia.

Mr Aarons said that in any mass immigration scheme such as the one that welcomed 300,000 people into Australia after World War II, it was inevitable that some persecutors would get in alongside refugees.

Bracks opens fire on rival claim to navy deal

Michael Bachelard
Michelle Wiese-Bockmann

AWARDING the \$6 billion navy destroyer project to Adelaide would risk the future of the naval shipbuilding industry in Australia for decades to come, a report commissioned by the Victorian Government has found.

Victorian Premier Steve Bracks said yesterday the contract should go to Victoria's Williamstown shipyard "if Australia is to retain its position as a competitive shipbuilding nation".

But the South Australian Government has attacked the Allen Consulting report as "hopelessly one-sided" and compared it to Soviet-style Pravda reports of the 1950s.

As the competition between the two southern states intensifies for the defence job, yesterday's report argues that closing Tenix's Melbourne facility would pose a "major and quite

unjustified risk" to future performance in naval shipbuilding.

"The (federal) Government is now faced with a strategic choice that will determine the future structure and competitiveness of the naval shipbuilding industry in Australia," the report says.

If Victoria were not awarded the contract, "naval shipbuilding would die in Victoria and be consolidated in South Australia and Western Australia, two states with a relatively thin labour market and fewer component suppliers".

"It seems likely that the future capability of the industry would be subject to a substantial risk."

Both states have promised massive inducements to prop up their bids: South Australia's is worth about \$100 million and Victoria's, the state's largest ever, is estimated at more than \$60 million.

Young families go north

Andrew Fraser

AUSTRALIANS are still drifting north to the warmth of Queensland, but the flow has slowed from more than 1000 people a week to 700.

In the year to June, Queensland's population increased by 80,998 — a drop of nearly 10,000 from the previous year.

Queensland's planning and forecasting unit chief Ross Barker said growth of about 75,000 was expected for this financial year, and Queensland's population would reach 4 million before the end of the calendar year.

In 2003-04, the state's net gain from interstate migration dropped by 64 per cent to 36,686, with 116,000 people arriving in Queensland but 79,000 people leaving.

In the same 12-month period, Tasmania and Western Australia recorded small gains from other states, but the big exodus was really from NSW, which lost about 30,000 people.

However, overall population growth in NSW increased because of an extra 40,000 births and 40,000 new overseas immigrants.

Contrary to popular myth, most of the new arrivals in Queensland were not retirees or cashed-up baby boomers looking for a sea-change, but young families in their 20s and 30s.

"The so-called baby boomer migration is not yet evident," Mr Barker said.

"The great bulk of the new arrivals are young people with families who settle in and around Brisbane, and bring their small children up with them."

The figures from Queensland's chief demographic unit showed less than 2000 people aged over 65 moved to Queensland from interstate in the year to June, but nearly 13,000 people in the 25-40 age group made the shift, with many accompanied by young children.

Queensland is also hanging on to its young people — before 2001, there was a regular drop in the population aged 20-25, but the number of people moving to Queensland in this age group has been steadily increasing, and numbered 2500 in the last recording period.

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Hospitals a state job

From Page 1

A high-level report to the Howard Government by former Health Department head Andrew Podger has effectively been put on ice.

Mr Podger, who was commissioned by the Prime Minister to work on ways to streamline health funding between Canberra and the states, has come up with some radical measures.

These include plans to bypass the states altogether to directly fund regional health bodies and introduce greater competition for government funds to the health sector.

Meanwhile, the Government is not extending its softly, softly approach to the community pharmacy sector. A new five-year deal, due to come into effect from July 1, is under negotiation. The commonwealth is offering chemists \$11.75 billion over five years, a \$3.3 billion jump on the current \$8.39 billion arrangement.

Chemists will receive \$10.87 for every script they dispense, compared with \$9.90 at present.

Pharmacy Guild president John Bronger has warned that the government offer would harm many smaller pharmacies.

A uniform view? No way

Trudy Harris

SANNA Trad would never be seen in a hot, stuffy traditional Islamic dress known as a mantoo — although she defends the right of her friends to wear it.

The sassy 16-year-old said yesterday she steered clear of the impractical and conservative ankle-length tunic, especially at school.

"I always wear a plain head scarf, especially when you're running around at school."

"Basically I'm an Australian girl and I understand Australian conditions so I like to feel comfortable," she said.

Sanna said she and her friends were divided over this week's controversy involving a female student given detention for continuing to wear the tunic that was not part of her official uniform.

The student claimed she suffered discrimination, and that her school, Auburn Girls High, was culturally insensitive. The school has since backed down, and the 17-year-old Shi'ite Muslim has returned to classes wearing her mantoo.

"Tolerating people's religious beliefs at school is an important part of this multicultural and tolerant society we are supposed to be living in," Sanna said after classes yesterday.



Divided: Sanna Trad, left, Tammy Alhalaby and Hala Trad

saying the schoolgirl had an indisputable right to wear whatever she understood was religiously appropriate.

Muslim clerics are divided over whether mantoes are mandatory for women or whether any loose-fitting clothes that cover the body suffice. The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils recommends the tunic, but some Islamic secondary schools do not.

Sanna, who attends a public school neighbouring Auburn Girls High, said she preferred a head scarf and long pants, and never had a problem with religious discrimination from teachers. She and her Muslim friends often approached their principal when changes were needed to their uniform.

The NSW Education Department said schools developed uniform policies after consulting with local community groups.