

# O'Farrell Government's Attacks and Cuts

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Since taking office in March 2011, Barry O'Farrell and his Government have made a number of cuts to funding, jobs, workers' rights and services. Here is an overview of what the workers of NSW have endured thus far.

## Attacks on Workers' Rights

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### Taken Control of IRC and Frozen Wages

- The Government passed the *Industrial Relations (Public Sector Conditions of Employment) Act 2011*. Consequently the Government has given itself complete power to determine wage increases (or not) and conditions for public sector staff through Regulations which do not have to pass any votes in the Parliament.
- The Industrial Relations Commission has had its power to arbitrate wage disputes removed.
- So far, the Government has frozen wage increases for public sector workers at 2.5%. Whilst the O'Farrell Government has claimed this will not leave public sector workers worse off, the University of Sydney's Workplace Research Centre found that a nurse would be \$12, 232 worse off and a teacher \$14, 580 worse off each year had the O'Farrell policy been applied over the past decade.

### Attacked Injured Workers

- Government amendments to the *Workers Compensation Act* saw significant cuts to the support and compensation provided to injured workers.
- The cuts to Workers Compensation means weekly payments will cease after 2.5 years and medical costs will stop being paid after 3.5 years for most injured workers.
- Additionally, workers will have almost non-existent coverage for accidents on their way to or from work.
- No lump sum payments can be made for pain and suffering, regardless of the severity of the injury.
- Changes to weekly benefits, medical costs and duration of payments are to apply as soon as possible to existing claims.
- The O'Farrell government attributed the needs for the cuts to a 'deficit' in WorkCover. The cuts have shifted the blame of the 'deficit' onto injured workers, with the Government hoping for a reduction in insurance premiums for employers.

### Stripped Police of their Death and Disability Protection

- The Government's *Police Amendment (Death and Disability) Act 2011* severely cut the support and rehabilitation provided to police who are injured on the job, as well as support for families of police officers killed at work.

## **Attacked Workers' Rights to Fairly Bargain Collectively**

- Currently before Parliament is the Government's *Industrial Relations Amendment (Dispute Orders) Bill 2012*. If this Bill is passed, it will increase fines for taking industrial action from \$10,000 a day to \$110,000 a day.
- It is also important to remember as mentioned above that unions no longer have the right to independent arbitration over wages and conditions and unlike the Federal industrial relations system have no legal right to strike through protected action.

## **No Consultation around Significant Industrial Changes**

- By way of example The *Technical and Further Education Commission Amendment (Staff Employment) Act 2011* saw 13,000 TAFE teachers transferred to the Federal industrial relations system where they now fall under the *Fair Work Act*
- No consultations with unions or teachers were attempted prior to the introduction and subsequent passing of this Act.
- Similarly, Government abolished the Transport Appeals Board with no discussion with unions.

## **Forcing Retail Workers to Work on Public Holidays**

- The *Retail Trading Amendment Bill 2012* presented by the O'Farrell Government will allow all retailers to trade on Boxing Day and Easter Sunday which will see employees being forced to work on what should be a day for families.
- The Bill will also lead to backroom staff and staff of retail businesses working on Christmas Day and Good Friday.

## **No Support for Equal Pay**

- The most recent State budget has not allocated any funding to equal pay for social and community sector workers in line with the recent Fair Work findings.
- There are 30,000 community and public sector workers in NSW. Without NSW funding these workers will not receive the awarded increases in full which range from 19 – 41 per cent.
- Prior to the election O'Farrell promised social and community sector workers a fair and equitable pay rise.

## **Slashing Public Sector Entitlements**

- The O'Farrell Government has applied to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission to change 98 different Public Sector Awards and enact massive cuts to entitlements and benefit.
- Some of the cuts include: slashing annual leave loading, cutting penalty rates for shift workers, removal of additional sick leave entitlements and parental leave.

## Attacks on Jobs

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The O'Farrell Government's two budgets to date have announced a total of 15,000 job cuts.

### Public Sector Job Cuts (to date)

- Rural Fire Service: 120 (August 2012)
- Sydney Water: 300 (July 2012)
- Illawarra TAFE: 250 (July 2012)
- Office of Environment and Heritage: 350 (July 2012)
- Roads and Maritime Services: 400 (July 2012)
- Grafton Jail: 108 (June 2012)
- Forests NSW: 40 (June 2012)
- Rail Corp: 750 (May 2012)
- Department of Attorney General and Justice: 489 (Oct 2011)
- Department of Education and Communities: 292 (October 2011)
- Department of Trade and Investment: 248 (October 2011)
- Department of Transport: 200 (October 2011)
- Department of Finance and Services: 214 (October 2011)
- Department of Family and Community Services: 173 (October 2011)
- Department of Premier and Cabinet: 138 (October 2011)
- Industrial Relations Office: 19 (September 2011)
- Cronulla Fisheries: 147 (September 2011)
- Parramatta, Berrima and Kirkconnell prisons: 350 (September 2011)
- NSW Department of Health: 300 (August 2011)

**Total: 4888**

### Expected Public Sector Job Cuts

- 2400 job losses expected from education over next 4 years
- 1000 TAFE teachers to go
- 900 job losses expected in Community Services over the next 4 years
- 3600 job losses expected in Health over the next 4 years
- 600 job losses expected in the corporatisation of Forests
- Job losses expected from power privatisation plans
- Job losses expected from water privatisation plans
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## Attacks on Our Community and Services

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### Allowed Shooting in Protected National Parks

- In a deal with the Shooters and Fishers Party, the O'Farrell Government has allowed shooters to hunt non-native animals in national parks.

- Such a move poses significant safety risks for workers as well as individuals and families visiting the park. Additionally, this hunting will have significant effects on the native wildlife within our protected national parks.

### **Destroying local jobs and communities**

- The downsizing and potential closure of Grafton Jail by the O'Farrell Government has seen the Grafton community rally to save their community. Despite the Government's commitment to invest in regional communities, O'Farrell has chosen to rip the heart out of the Grafton community, by cutting jobs and destroying the local economy.
- Grafton is not the first regional community to see public sector cuts from the O'Farrell Government and it won't be the last.

### **Privatised Electricity Generators**

- Despite an election promise to the people of Lithgow, O'Farrell and his government privatised all generators across NSW.
- Not only will this significantly affect the jobs of those in the electricity industry, the people of NSW will see further increases to electricity bills into the future as a result.
- The Government has also not denied plans to privatise the poles and wires if they are returned to Government after the next election.

### **School Funding Cuts**

- The O'Farrell Government cut \$1.7 billion from education funding - \$201 million will be cut from public schools and \$116 million will be cut from private schools
- Under these cuts, up to 1,800 TAFE teachers and education support staff will be sacked
- The O'Farrell Government has abolished a number of TAFE courses
- TAFE fees increased by 9.5%

### **Health Cuts**

- More than \$2 billion in cuts to services and hospital budgets.
- \$775 million in staffing cuts.
- Including some 3,600 health workers set to lose their jobs.

18<sup>th</sup> September 2012