



Mr Carmody
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PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

Last year, following a promise to the Australian community, the Government introduced its secret ballot legislation.

In effect, the legislation simply required secret postal ballots for elections of senior trade union officials. The elections would be conducted in two ways - either by the Commonwealth Electoral Office, free of charge, or by the union itself, at its own cost.

The Government introduced this legislation because it was sick and tired of men and women unable to have a real say in how their union was run. Generally, the system of secret ballots is now working well. Unions are making use of the electoral office to run their elections. In doing so they are saving thousands of dollars in election costs. Official figures show how well this system is being accepted.

In the twelve months prior to August 9 last year, when the legislation came into effect, there were 178 applications for officially conducted elections. In the twelve months following that date, the number was 244 - a 37% increase. This is an encouraging trend. However, it is still too early to assess fully the impact of the legislation, as many unions have not had to hold elections in the period.

The Government believes that eventually the great majority of organisations will have their elections officially conducted. This can only lead to a continuing strengthening of a union members fundamental right - and that is the right to have a proper say in how his own union is run. Unfortunately, some unions and union leaders are not playing ball.

The Government has been advised that the Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights Union - Australia's largest union - has sought to conduct elections in an improper and illegal way. It is reported that the union has tried to go back to the old star night technique where members are lucky if 2% of them get a proper opportunity to vote.

As a result of information that has come to the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, the Arbitration Inspectorate has carried out a very detailed investigation of this matter.

If the Industrial Registrar confirms the breaches, there will then be only two courses of action left. New elections will be held - or the union will be prosecuted for breach of the law.

The Builders Labourers Federation has also sought to overturn the purpose and spirit of the secret ballot system. The Government has been advised that that particular union changed its rules for election of office bearers to exclude members from the right to stand for election.

Accordingly, Tony Street is examining further amendments to the secret ballot legislation to make sure that the spirit of that legislation is given effect.

We are determined that the rank and file trade unionist will not be run over roughshod by any power seeking union official. The right of men and women unionists will be protected.

In essence, our secret ballot legislation seeks to give unionists - and all Australians - a better go, a fairer deal.

It is working. It is giving unionists throughout Australia a fair chance to have their voice heard. In thousands of cases it gives them this right for the first time.

The Government will make sure that this keeps happening, that this right is maintained - for all unionists.

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