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The PSA wages claim was officially launched in the Industrial Commission on 11 February 2011 in response to the previous government refusing to come to agreement. We said at the time: "Too many years of clinging to the ALP's skirt and not enough emphasis on generating an independent industrial capacity means we are now vulnerable to any change of government. Worse than that, our union appears to have lost the capacity to extract a decent deal from a government that is on its knees."

Taking advantage of the situation the O'Farrell government has now introduced legislation which according to the Sydney Morning Herald, 25/5/2011, grants to the government: "the power to not only stipulate wage rises but also other conditions including leave entitlements. The Industrial Relations Commission would be stripped of its independent power and forced to abide by any government policy on employment conditions for public servants in a regulation issued by the Finance Minister."

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/public-service-revolution-20110524-1f2ky.html#ixzz1NJaSxI6n>

The Progressives have been urging the current union leadership to mobilise members for a campaign since before the 2010 May Annual Conference. Rather than claim 'we told you so' it is more important now to examine the direction of the current union leadership and to assist in fighting this unprecedented threat.

Given that our employer also makes the rules controlling the Industrial Commission it is a myth that it can operate as an 'independent umpire'. The Coalition's announcement shows that they are unable to distinguish their legislative and employer roles. As with their retrospective legislation on the Solar Bonus Scheme it shows they are either ignorant of the conventions of good governance or have complete contempt for it.

Pay claim or pay campaign?

It was clear to many delegates at the last PSA Annual Conference that the Executive members were hoping against hope the former Government would come to the party and secure a pre-election pay agreement.

The recent PSA official announcement of a campaign to "commence immediately" is very welcome. We encourage all delegates and members to participate. Years of excluding members from decision making in pay 'campaigns' has seriously weakened our union. However, we can rebuild that capacity. Jeff Walters, PPSA supporter, Attorney Generals, commented: "It will take more than huff and puff announcements. That approach didn't work under the last government and it certainly won't work under this one. A grassroots approach similar to that taken by Corrective Services delegates at Cessnock, or delegates at NSW Ferries is what is needed. We need a fully fledged 'Rights at Work' campaign which includes all the affected public sector unions".

Where to from here?

Boyd Kellner, from schools, observed: "The threat to restrict public sector union bargaining rights can be defeated with strong and united action. However, we don't want another top-down campaign where members are expected to do the work without helping to make the decisions. It will take time and trust to rebuild the PSA's industrial capacity. There's no better time than now to do it."



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