



Turnbull in turnaround on Labor's IR reforms

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The Federal Opposition is preparing to block key aspects of the Government's proposed industrial relations changes, saying they go much further than Labor promised before the election and could lift unemployment.

Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull, who has said that Labor had a mandate for industrial relations reform and the coalition was unlikely to oppose new laws, said yesterday he was aware of the angst among mining companies about the planned changes and expected to win some concessions from the Government in the Senate.

Mr Turnbull said Labor originally promised that right of entry provisions for unions would not change. But the Bill, to be investigated by a Senate committee, granted unions extensive rights to access the books of companies and to study workers' private pay and employment details.

"Labor stated expressly in its Forward with Fairness policy that right of entry laws would be maintained," he said. "That undertaking has been broken and the right of entry arrangements proposed constitute a material change from the status quo."

Mr Turnbull said the Government

should release modelling to the Senate committee showing how the new laws would affect unemployment and the Australian economy.

"If it either does not have, or will not produce, such analysis then the Australian people will assume (it) has something to hide," he said.

Mr Turnbull also called on businesses to give evidence to the inquiry about how the laws would affect them.

Senior WA Liberals said yesterday they would go in to battle in the Senate to make changes to the Bill after listening to complaints from mining and resources companies, which argue that the laws are too inflexible.

The Australian Mines and Metals Association said this week that Labor's proposed changes would allow unions to examine the pay and employment details of non-union workers and would require companies to win union approval for a project before it could begin.

"The mining industry has got enough to worry about in terms of consistent market price and to add workplace relations to what is already a very difficult set of circumstances is utterly crazy and typically Eastern

States centric," WA Liberal Senator David Johnston said.

"There's a lot of people's livelihoods and a lot of jobs that are going to be put in jeopardy when employers have to deal with a whole new set of industrial relations parameters that are predominantly union focused."

WA Liberal MP Mathias Cormann said Labor was using the legacy of the Howard government's WorkChoices laws as a smokescreen to hand control to union bosses. "Julia Gillard is going well beyond what Labor said they would do before the last election," Senator Cormann said.

Independent Senator Nick Xenophon has also confirmed he might try to force changes to the legislation, cautioning Labor against imposing a regime that could add to the growing unemployment problem.

Greens industrial relations spokeswoman Rachel Siewert said Mr Turnbull could face difficulties keeping the WA Liberals in line and on message as the laws were debated in the Senate.

She said the Greens could also seek changes to the laws, including provisions that would allow workers to strike over environmental causes.