Symposium:

The reform of the Australian workplace representation regime

David Peetz, ‘The roller coaster of reform politics and the implications for union organising’

Barbara Pocock, ‘The implications for family–friendly flexible working arrangements’

Anthony Forsyth, ‘Good Faith Bargaining: Australian, United States and Canadian Comparisons’

Australia has been the site for radical swings in workplace representation law in recent years as well as the electoral defeat of a national government as a result of popular rejection of its industrial relations policy. A new legislative regime (principally the ‘Fair Work Act’) has been put in place by the incoming Labor government with new supportive institutions, and it seems likely that this will represent a relatively stable framework into at least the medium term. It draws on concepts that have found expression in North American and British law, tailored to the Antipodean context, and is portrayed as representing a decidedly centrist policy position. This symposium brings together four researchers from the land down under to answer the following questions: Why has Australian workplace representation law been such a roller coaster ride, and has it really reached a stable plateau? What does it mean for work–life balance and the encouragement of family–friendly working arrangements? How similar in practice are the new ‘good faith’ provisions to North American concepts of good faith bargaining, and what will be their effects? How has the ‘Fair Work’ framework sought to promote collective bargaining amongst low paid workers, and what are its prospects for success? What are the implications of the law for union busting and union organizing? Why have the building and construction unions recommended passage of legislation to which they are vehemently opposed? Can Canadians and others learn anything from the Australian experience, or are they just a bunch of crazies down under?