

AAP HARASSES UNION OFFICERS

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The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance - the people who inform and entertain Australia**



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Australian Associated Press (AAP), the news agency owned by News Limited, Fairfax Media, WA Newspapers and Rural Press, has begun 2007 with a strident anti-employee attitude. It has demanded that Alliance officers visiting Alliance members at AAP workplaces enter the company's offices via a goods lift and be escorted by a senior member of AAP management to a separate area away from the newsroom – behaviour that is not only absurd but contemptibly childish.

Alliance officers are seeking to meet with Alliance members at AAP in Melbourne today to discuss the company's intention to implement individual contracts across the workforce. Management has already begun promoting individual contracts at meeting at AAP offices in Perth. Meetings at AAP in Sydney and Canberra and other AAP locations will follow.

Alliance federal secretary Christopher Warren says "AAP's attitude is ridiculously churlish. Its decision to segregate Alliance officers from Alliance members smacks of an employer that has no respect for its employees and the work they do," Warren says.

Historically, meetings between Alliance members and their union's officers are held in the newsroom or lunchroom at AAP sites. But in a sudden change of attitude, AAP management has told Alliance officials that they must enter the sites by a separate entrance, use the goods lift to go to the editorial floor, be escorted by senior management to ensure there is no contact with Alliance members, and then conduct any meetings with Alliance members in a separate location and not the traditional meeting areas.

AAP management claims that this ridiculously absurd behaviour is a requirement of the WorkChoices laws. However, a recent decision granting leave to appeal to the Full Bench of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission has raised questions over the Workplace relations Act's provisions regarding right of entry. The case involves the officer of another union seeking to enter an Australian Taxation Office workplace.

"While this issue is still to be clarified by the Commission, it would be common sense for AAP to allow Alliance officers and Alliance members to meet at AAP in the same circumstances they have always done – that is, meeting with Alliance members in either the newsroom or the lunchroom. Common sense rather than petty intrigues should apply in this case," Warren says.

AAP employs about 200 journalists and photographers across Australia. The Alliance urges employees not to sign individual contracts until they have sought advice.

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