

# Unions mobilise as families brace for new industrial laws

By LINTON BESSER

JASON Bern is a typical Illawarra steelworker.

An operator's assistant in the Port Kembla coke ovens, he gets an incredible 50 per cent of his pay packet from penalty rates.

And with seven children under the age of 14 and a healthy mortgage, he doesn't even want to think about losing those extras.

"If I lose my penalty rates, I'm in big trouble," he said.

His wife Allison, who works part-time on Wollongong Hospital's catering staff, puts it even more bleakly.

"We would lose our house." The young family are worried their way of life is under threat in the new industrial relations landscape that was recently rubber stamped by the High Court.

And they are the face of a union push to bolster a national rally at the end of the month.

South Coast Labour Council secretary Arthur Rorris said the Benn family's predicament showed "what there is to lose".

"They are a bit larger than the average family, but they are a picture of regional Australia and how hard it is to make ends meet.

"Let alone under an AWA (Australian Workplace Agreement)." Mrs Benn said every dollar was carefully budgeted and in a year when food and petrol prices had spiked, it was a fragile balance.

"Our four-year-old Jack has arthritis. Today I went to a specialist to get X-rays and medication," she said. "It cost us \$300."

She said she worried about her children's future under the changed industrial regime.

"The next generation will just have to accept it," she said.

Mr Rorris said the National Day of Action rally would be held at WIN Stadium on November 30.