

## Unions will keep heat on Howard



THOUSANDS of Illawarra working men and women took to the streets of Wollongong yesterday to join a nationwide protest against the Howard Government's industrial relations changes.

About 7000 people, many dressed in work uniforms or waving the flags of various unions, descended on WIN Stadium for the rally, which concluded with a march on the Crown St offices of Senator Concetta FierravantiWells. Those in WIN Stadium's stands by 8.30am heard passionate addresses from South Coast Labour Council secretary Arthur Rorris and CFMEU national secretary John Sutton.

At 9am, with the help of a giant TV screen located on the hill, the WIN Stadium crowd was linked to the national protest's nerve centre at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

"I want to congratulate the Illawarra for standing up," Mr Rorris told the Wollongong crowd. "This is a campaign two years in the making, and we now enter the vital third leg leading up to the next election."

The union leader's call for a show of hands to support Mr Howard's removal was greeted with predictable, universal approval. Mr Rorris reminded the crowd a swing of "just a few per cent" would result in a change of government.

"We've been around for 150 years and we'll see this Government out," he said.

Mr Sutton told the crowd the Coalition reforms marked a return "to the days of the Masters and Servants Act", before the rally took to the streets of Wollongong towards the office of Senator Fierravanti-Wells. But the small delegation sent to meet the senator left disappointed after discovering she was in Canberra.

"I was surprised to learn that the national secretary of the CFMEU, Mr John Sutton, came into my electorate office in Wollongong wanting to speak to me today about the industrial relations laws when it was clearly a parliamentary sitting week," Sen Fierravanti-Wells said.

"This is a clear example of just how inept, disorganised and misinformed the unions are."

Illawarra Business Chamber president Terry Wetherall acknowledged yesterday's turnout at WIN Stadium was significant, but said his organisation's support for a new IR regime had not altered.

"People have the right to protest and the union movement have made their point very succinctly, but it's not a position we support," Mr Wetherall said.

"We've always stated our position in terms of change. Business needs certainty."

Union claims that workers at BlueScope Steel were intimidated by company management into not attending the rally were dismissed by company management.

"The vast majority of our employees chose to come to work this morning and we appreciate their commitment to their business and our customers. There was a small group who chose to take unauthorised time off work and, as a result, they will lose four hours' pay," BlueScope Steel president of Australian and New Zealand industrial markets Noel Cornish said.

"We totally reject any suggestion of intimidation. The facts are that we worked with those employees who wanted to attend the rally to enable them to swap shifts or take leave where that was possible.

