

NATIONAL

## Students join IR protest rally

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By **David Braithwaite**

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About 300 high school and university students marched through Sydney today to protest over the government's new industrial relations laws.

The nationwide action comes in the wake of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) legislation which will see compulsory union fees scrapped from next month.

The students are also angered by the federal government's industrial reform package, Work Choices, which critics claim strips rights from workers.

The action is being coordinated by left-wing political group Resistance, which is encouraging high school-aged students to skip class and protest in various Australian cities.

It has also received some union support and a cautious endorsement from parent groups.

The march was escorted by about 30 police including a small number of mounted police.

The students chanted and held up signs such as "Stop Screwing Us Over Howard" and "Up Yours Howard".

At an earlier rally one teenager was cautioned by police for spray painting Suck Howard on a tree.

Many of the high school students spoken to by *smh.com.au* have skipped classes for the afternoon to attend the rally.

Nellie Howes, 16, of St Scholastica's School in Glebe, said she skipped school and was risking suspension to join the rally because she was concerned about how the laws would affect her in the future.

"My parents don't know about it yet but the majority of our teachers are all for it," she said. "We just have to catch up on our work."

One of the organisers urged the protesters to keep the rally peaceful.

"Students are angry and are determined to show their opposition to Work Choices," said Resistance member and rally organiser Simon Cunich.

"Already we have seen employers cut wages and force young workers to sign individual contracts."

A NSW Department of Education spokesman said major absenteeism was not expected to result from the day of action.

- with AAP

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