



Unions go national in fight against IR laws

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Unions will stage protest rallies across capital cities and regional centres over a month as the ACTU seeks to build momentum for its campaign to rewrite the federal industrial relations laws.

Union leaders have promised up to 150,000 workers will attend Melbourne's "largest ever" union rally on October 23, bringing the city to a halt, as they commit to

spending millions of dollars trying to re-elect the Andrews government in Victoria and defeat the federal Coalition.

The rally will be weeks out from the Victorian election, with union officials predicting city construction projects and the Melbourne waterfront will be shut down.

ACTU president Michele O'Neil said unions would be protesting in other capital cities and regional centres.

"Across the period of about a month, there will be national pro-

tests," she told the ABC's *National Wrap*. Workers wanted to protest about wages going backwards and "we want the government to take notice and do something that's going to make a difference".

Australian Mines and Metals Association chief executive Steve Knott said Fair Work Ombudsman Sandra Parker should caution workers about participating in the rally if they were covered by current enterprise agreements.

"Thousands of employees illegally walked off the job in Melbourne in May, shutting down ports and disrupting both businesses and families in the CBD," Mr Knott said. "At the time

AMMA warned more disruptive unlawful political rallies would follow if the Fair Work Ombudsman, the regulator charged with the responsibility of ensuring compliance with Australia's IR laws, didn't take strong action.

"Our IR laws, presided over by both ALP and Coalition govern-

ments, state strike action during the term of an enterprise agreement is both unprotected and unlawful. Accordingly the FWO must take action to hold to account those who irresponsibly and illegally seek

to damage Australian business and disrupt the community.

"Australia must send a message that our nation is not run by, and will not be held captive to, left-wing union bosses and professional activists."

Ms O'Neil said workers had a democratic right to protest and unions would defend workers against any action taken against them for participating in the rallies.

ACTU secretary Sally McManus has said unions needed to show non-union members that

"there is strength in numbers, strength in Australia's union movement that is prepared to fight for a better, fairer country".

"Let's put on the biggest show they have ever seen," she told delegates in Melbourne last month.

Mr Knott said the FWO had a national duty, backed by \$188 million in public funding and more than 700 staff, to hold to account those who incite and engage in illegal industrial action.

"Anything less than pursuing and prosecuting those illegally en-

gaging in this proposed so-called 'mega rally' would be a failure in exercising those duties and protecting the community.

"Part of this should involve cautioning employees covered by in-term enterprise agreements that if they walk off the job to attend this rally they would be breaking the law and risk a personal fine that could exceed \$12,000.

"If people want to take part in a political rally, they should do so in the confines of the law — on their own time."

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STEVE KNOTT

AUSTRALIAN MINES AND METALS
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