



Albanese faces IR stoush as employers back bill

Dana McCauley

Labor leader Anthony Albanese is heading for a showdown with the Coalition over industrial relations as employers throw their support behind the government's union-busting legislation following union boss John Setka's refusal to resign.

Employment Minister Michaelia Cash yesterday called on Labor to "sever all ties" with the powerful Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union as federal Labor crafts a new approach to industrial relations following last month's electoral defeat.

Senator Cash accused Mr Albanese of "weasel words" for moving to expel Mr Setka from the ALP following his reported comments about anti-violence campaigner Rosie Batty, while still accepting donations from the union.

Master Builders of Australia chief executive Denita Wawn welcomed Mr Albanese's handling of Mr Setka, the secretary of the CFMMEU's Victorian construction branch, but said he "cannot legitimately ring-fence the issue from its industrial relations context".

The Coalition this week seized on the furore over Mr Setka to renew its commitment to the Ensuring Integrity Bill, which was blocked in the Senate last year by Labor, the Greens and key crossbenchers.

Ms Wawn said Mr Setka's "antics" were just "the tip of the iceberg" and welcomed the government's revival of the bill, which

would lower the threshold for courts to deregister unions that break the law and disqualify officials after two civil law breaches.

The legislation was about "making sure that fit and proper people are in charge of unions and employer organisations, not bullies and thugs", she said.

Australian Resources and Energy Group's chief executive, Steve Knott, urged both major parties to support the bill, which he said was "necessary to disincentivise law-breaking and remove recidivist offenders from holding positions of office" within unions.

Mr Albanese declared a "clean slate" on Labor's policy agenda after voters rejected its plan to overhaul Australia's workplace laws to give unions more power and abolish the Australian Building and Construction Commission, which continues to pursue the CFMMEU in the courts.

However, Labor remains unlikely to support the Ensuring Integrity Bill, with Mr Albanese telling ABC radio yesterday that the government was "obsessed with its anti-union position" and believed workers shouldn't have bargaining rights.

He said unions were "critical" and the idea of a construction industry without unions fighting exploitation and keeping workers safe was "totally inappropriate".

Newly elected Labor senator Tony Sheldon said the government was seeking to place obligations on union officials that went "far beyond" those that applied to federal

politicians or company directors.



Anthony Albanese. Photo: AAP