



INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Alliance senator holds key to future of workplace bill

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The Morrison government's mammoth industrial relations bill will likely pass or fail by Centre Alliance senator Stirling Griff's hand after One Nation demanded only a short list of non-negotiable changes to the proposed laws.

The government is likely to secure One Nation's two senate votes after the minor party unveiled a set of amendments yesterday pertaining to casuals, part-time workers and pay deals on big construction projects that do not change the core of the bill.

With One Nation's probable support, the government is just one Senate vote short of passing its bill this week, despite bitter Labor opposition. That shifts the focus to Centre Alliance Senator Stirling Griff, who is the government's best shot at the third and final vote it needs after the other two crossbenchers, Senator Rex Patrick and Jacqui Lambie, effectively declared their opposition.

Asked whether One Nation would vote for the bill if the government accepted the "non-negotiable" amendments, Senator Malcolm Roberts said: "Yes ... it's necessary to protect small business, necessary to protect big business ... and especially necessary to protect employees".

There remains a gap between Centre Alliance and One Nation on casuals.

Under the bill, casuals would be offered a chance to convert to permanent work if they have been employed for at least a year and doing regular shifts for six months, though One Nation wants that restricted to big business and to reduce the one-year re-

quirement.

However, businesses can decline if they need the employee to stay casual and Centre Alliance had said it wanted to give workers access to quick and cheap arbitration if there is disagreement about how that applies.

"There needs to be a formal process, whether that is arbitration or other meaningful options is up for negotiation," Senator Griff said yesterday.

Senator Roberts said he did not support arbitration because, he said, it would make things more complicated for businesses already struggling with an industrial system that was "already far too complex".

Unions had a few wins in One Nation's proposal, including reducing the length of employment before casuals at big businesses were offered a chance to go permanent from 12 months to six. The party also wants workers who are offered a base number of hours in

industries like retail, but end up regularly working more, to be able to nominate the higher number as their baseline after a year.

Greenfields agreements, which govern pay and conditions on big construction projects, will only be allowed to run for six years rather than eight and must be worth more than \$500 million rather than \$250 million. They

will have to also include annual pay rises "fairer than the CPI", which measures inflation.

The Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union had argued the original proposal could effectively lock workers into years of meagre wage rises but the Australian Mines and Metals Association said it would encourage investment by heading off the pos-



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sibility of costly strikes mid-project.

One Nation rejected other union demands, such as restoring prescriptive industrial commission checks on enterprise agreements and changes to the definition of a casual worker. “As we started to explore the definition and started tinkering with it, it just became a minefield,” Senator Roberts said.

It will likewise make no changes to new rules making it harder for misclassified workers, such as miners the party has championed, to get backpay.

“We’re convinced the rights are there for people who have been wrongly paid,” Senator Roberts said, pointing to increased penalties for underpayment elsewhere in the bill.



Senator Stirling Griff holds the final vote. Photo: Dominic Lorrimer