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Coalition renews CFMEU assault

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Election22

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The Coalition has vowed to double the maximum penalties that can be imposed on the CFMEU for unlawful conduct and legislate controversial six-year workplace deals on major projects if re-elected, as Scott Morrison reignites his fight with Anthony Albanese over industrial relations.

Seeking to highlight Labor's promise to scrap the Australian Building and Construction Commission by launching a fresh assault on the CFMEU's record, Industrial Relations Minister Michaelia Cash said a returned Morrison government would aim to increase maximum penalties the courts can impose on a union to an extraordinary \$444,000, and \$88,800 on union officials.

The increased penalties would cover offences including unlawful industrial action, coercion and unlawful picketing. The Coalition's move follows last week's High Court ruling that maximum penalties can be imposed on the CFMEU for less serious offences.

Senator Cash said the "increase in penalties will act as a deterrent for those thuggish unions who see the current fines as simply a cost of doing business".

"Mr Albanese and Labor are fully aware of this behaviour and have done nothing to stop it. Instead they are promising to abolish the ABCC, the strong cop on the beat ensuring that workers in the construction sector are able to go to work each day without the fear of being harassed," she said.

The ABCC has secured \$14.8m in penalties against the CFMEU and its representatives since 2016, including \$2.17m this financial

year.

The Coalition's new bid to make CFMEU militancy an election issue comes as Mr Morrison promised to again try to legislate six-year greenfields agreements in the resources sector.

Under the revised proposal, which was attacked by Labor and the ACTU but backed by business, the agreements would apply to projects of \$500m or more, with workers guaranteed yearly pay rises in line with the annual minimum wage review.

The Coalition has promised, if re-elected, to resurrect the industrial relations omnibus bill gutted last year but the greenfields agreement proposal would be split off and put up as a standalone bill. Mr Morrison also pledged to again introduce legislation for one-touch approvals for major projects under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Ahead of the first campaign debate in Brisbane on Wednesday night, Mr Morrison and Mr Albanese traded barbs over cashless debit cards and Labor's energy policy.

Speaking in the Labor-held southern Brisbane seat of Griffith, which is under threat from the Greens, Mr Albanese accused the

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campaign" on renewables and his promise to drive down energy prices.

Mr Morrison was also forced to defend Labor claims that the Coalition would expand its cashless debit card across all income management systems and capture pensioners. He labelled Mr Albanese's attack as "despicable" and a "complete and utter lie".

The skirmishes were expected to spill over into the first of three campaign debates, which Mr Albanese is hoping will reset his gaffe-prone campaign. Both leaders are preparing for an ugly debate over character and policy clashes.

Opposition industrial relations spokesman Tony Burke said Mr Morrison was secretly planning to resurrect his "extreme workplace laws".

Labor will launch campaign ads on Wednesday attacking Mr Morrison's IR policies and raising concerns the Coalition would abolish the "Better Off Overall Test", which was shelved after the government failed to win crossbench support.

"Mr Morrison is sharpening his knife to slash your pay and conditions. At a time when the price of everything has gone up and your pay has gone backwards, Mr Morrison now wants to cut your pay even further and make your job less secure," Mr Burke said.

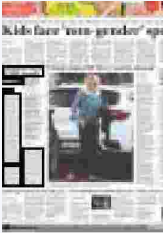
"By scrapping the Better Off Overall Test, Mr Morrison's laws will allow for agreements that cut the pay and conditions of workers. If he succeeds, everything from shift allowances to penalty rates is on the chopping block. Mr Morrison's radical laws would also make part-time work even less secure."

ACTU secretary Sally McManus said the Coalition's greenfields policy linking pay rises for thousands of construc-

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government of running a "scare



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tion workers to the national minimum wage increase would represent a pay cut for huge numbers of workers.

Unions said the national minimum wage had increased by an average 2.71 per cent a year since 2015, while greenfields agreements had delivered an average 3.1 per cent in annual pay rises over the same period.

“The mining and construction companies that run these projects are some of the most profitable companies operating in Australia,” Ms McManus said.

“The Prime Minister is once again proposing to cut the wages of working people while protecting the profits of big businesses.”

Business Council chief executive Jennifer Westacott said the six-year agreements for greenfields projects would deliver more certainty on pay and conditions, make investment in major projects more attractive and give workers a wage rise every year.

Australian Mines and Metals Association chief executive Steve Knott said the agreements could have an in-built mechanism to ensure appropriate pay increases throughout the life of the project. “Under Anthony Albanese the ALP has promised to be more supportive of business than the opposition led by Mr Shorten in 2019. Mr Albanese now has an opportunity to demonstrate that,” he said

Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said it made no sense for a greenfields agreement for a major project to expire at a critical stage during construction of the project.