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Port chaos a glimpse into Albanese's IR future

Statement by Steve Knott AM, Chief Executive, Australian Resources and Energy Employer Association

The dispute engulfing Australia's ports five weeks out from Christmas offers a glimpse into Australia's future under Anthony Albanese's proposed new industrial relations (IR) laws.

Far from discouraging such disputes, the monstrous 249-page IR amendment bill that the Prime Minister and his Minister for Workplace Relations Tony Burke are trying to ram through Parliament will only further incentivise militant unions to take rolling strikes across critical supply chains.

The key difference is unions like the CFMMEU will:

- Be able to coordinate strikes and shutdowns across multiple entities within supply chain sectors, eliminating common contingency strategies to keep the economy afloat;
- Be further incentivised to pursue unreasonable claims and organise daily strikes, knowing they will eventually be awarded when the Fair Work Commission steps in and arbitrates an outcome; and
- Will no longer face the prospect of any employer response like terminating expired agreements or locking out employees.

It is concerning Minister Burke's first reaction to news of this significant dispute is to spruik an IR bill that has been overwhelmingly rejected by the business community and is failing to get support of the Senate.

A bill designed to hand union bosses more power is not the answer to a dispute brought about by militant union bosses.

In less than one month, Svitzer has been hit with 250 instances of strikes resulting in the loss of 2000 working hours. The employer was left with no choice but to lock-out employees having been left unable to safely and effectively carry out its contracted work.

Minister Burke has existing powers under the current workplace laws to step in and put an end to this dispute.

AREEA encourages the Minister to take a break from his IR bill marketing tour to consider the options at his disposal.

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