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Daily Media Overview



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Rogue union crackdown

The Morrison government is close to securing legislation to make it easier to deregister rogue unions and officials after the Centre Alliance said it was confident of winning changes in return for voting for the bill. **News p3**

PM closes in on bill to deregister unions

Phillip Coorey
Political editor

The government is close to securing the passage of legislation making it easier to deregister rogue unions and officials after the Centre Alliance said it was confident of winning a number of changes in return for voting for the bill.

With Cory Bernardi already expected to support the Ensuring Integrity Bill and One Nation giving it consideration, the government needs either Centre Alliance or Jacqui Lambie to secure the numbers in the Senate.

Centre Alliance senator Rex Patrick told *The Australian Financial Review* that Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter was open to the suggested amendments and he was confident a deal could be secured when they met in about a fortnight.

Centre Alliance wants a provision removed that would enable a minister to lodge an application to deregister a union or an official, something for which there is no equivalent in the corporate sector.

It also wants to remove the ability to move against union officials if they have breached a law in another country.

Senator Patrick said some countries, for example, regarded homosexuality as illegal and others had “dodgy legal systems”.

Centre Alliance also wants greater clarity to ensure the bill deals with egregious conduct “and does not prevent a responsible union official doing what they normal do”, including protecting workers’ safety and social wellbeing.

Labor and the trade union movement oppose the bill, which the government fast-tracked into parliament to highlight the labour movement’s discomfort over militant Victorian CFMEU secretary John Setka.

Labor leader Anthony Albanese is trying to expel Mr Setka from the ALP

and the ACTU has also tried to put pressure on him to stand down as the head of the union. He is resisting both moves.

Senator Lambie has threatened to vote for the bill if Mr Setka is still at the

helm of the union when the Senate is scheduled to deal with the legalisation in October.

Senator Patrick said Mr Setka’s tenure wouldn’t affect his party’s decision.

“You don’t base laws on a single person,” he said. “Our only concern is with the conduct of the unions, in particular the CFMEU.”

He said Centre Alliance was not interested in union bashing and wanted the proposed laws to reflect those that dealt with corporate misconduct. “We want to deal with the conduct we find disturbing while making sure that the good unions are not affected.”

The bill is before a Senate inquiry.

Labor suspects the government may try to rush a vote in the Senate before the inquiry is finished, if it has the numbers, but Senator Patrick said Centre Alliance would not be amenable.

With Senator Bernardi onside, the government needs three extra Senate votes. Centre Alliance has two votes, as does One Nation, while Senator Lambie has a single vote.

When parliament resumes next week for the first fortnight of the spring session, the government will push the Senate to vote on revoking the Medevac bill, which passed both houses before the election with the support of Labor, the Greens and crossbenchers.

The bill facilitates the transfer to Australia of sick asylum seekers for medical treatment. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton claims the passage of the bill has sparked renewed efforts by people smugglers.

Centre Alliance opposes the repeal, meaning Senator Lambie’s vote is critical. She has warned the government against trying to rush a vote.

Key points

With Cory Bernardi onside, the government needs three extra Senate votes.

These could emerge through One Nation, Centre Alliance and/or Jacqui Lambie.



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Setka rift drives union officials out of HQ

EWIN HANNAN
WORKPLACE EDITOR

CFMEU national secretary Michael O'Connor and officials of the union's manufacturing division are moving out of its Victorian head office because of mounting conflict with John Setka.

Senior union officials said the last straw was Mr Setka's alleged attempt to recruit top organisers from the manufacturing division to his construction division and poach their members.

"He's become an out-of-control wrecking ball," one senior union official told The Australian.

"John Cummins would be ashamed of him, putting himself before union members."

Mr Setka named the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union's Victorian headquarters after Cummins, the former Builders Labourers Federation official Mr Setka regards as his mentor.

Multiple sources said on Wednesday that Mr O'Connor and the manufacturing division officials intended to leave the building on Friday and would move to an office in Carlton. Sources said the move would cost members because the union would be paying for a new lease while parts of the Victorian headquarters would now be empty.

"It is a waste of members' money but the reality is the relationship has become untenable," one official said.

The Australian revealed last week that national officials were threatening Federal Court action against Mr Setka after he allegedly demanded two organisers defect to his camp and "pinch" members from the manufacturing division.

Sources said the two organisers told senior officials Mr Setka called them to his office and told them to defect from the manufacturing division to construction "or you won't have a career left".

"When you come over, you are

going to be pinching their (manufacturing) members," Mr Setka allegedly said, according to the organisers' accounts to national officials. Sources said poaching members from a rival division was in breach of CFMEU rules.

Officials said yesterday the Federal Court action would not be launched until there was an attempt to recruit manufacturing division members, as this would give Mr Setka's opponents a better chance of convincing the court that union rules had been broken.

Mr O'Connor is overseas and did not respond to a request for

comment. Mr Setka initially promised to comment but changed his mind.

ACTU secretary Sally McManus said yesterday that 80 per cent of the union movement wanted Mr Setka to resign as Victorian construction division secretary of the CFMEU. She told ABC television that union leaders had asked Mr Setka to put the interests of the whole movement ahead of his own. "He's decided not to take our advice," McManus said.

She said the Morrison government was trying to make the Ensuring Integrity Bill —

designed to make it easier to deregister unions and ban officials — all about Mr Setka when it impacted on the whole union movement.

Ms McManus confirmed the ACTU would likely drop its "change the rules" slogan ahead of the next election.

The Australian revealed last month the ACTU would dump the slogan in favour of a simple direct message, after a confidential review found the campaign pitch was not well understood beyond union officials and activists.

Following the amalgamation to create the CFMEU, the manufac-

turing division represents workers in the forestry, furnishing, building products, pulp and paper, textile, clothing and footwear manufacturing industries. The move by Mr O'Connor is the latest outbreak of

public disunity in the CFMEU.

Mr Setka's branch last week dumped law firm Gordon Legal and shifted the union's legal work to Maurice Blackburn.

Relations between Mr Setka and Gordon Legal had been under strain for months and worsened in June when the union targeted the firm as part of the state branch's probe into leaks against Mr Setka.



O'Connor



Setka

