

Federal Election 2016

Federal election 2016: Libs back off toughest CFMEU measures

Elizabeth Colman, Joe Kelly, The Australian, June 18, 2016



Minister for Employment Michaelia Cash at the National Press Club in Canberra. Picture: Ray Strange

The Turnbull government has shied away from adopting heavyweight measures that would give parliament power to blacklist law-breaking militant construction union officials, as urged by the Heydon royal commission.

Employment Minister Michaelia Cash pledged yesterday to target union finances, promising new laws that could threaten trade union income worth millions of dollars a year and curb how union bosses spend members' funds.

Under the Coalition's "better workplaces" policy, unions must declare payments for training and other activities from companies during enterprise bargaining, and there would be limits on how members' money could be spent.

The changes, based on the Heydon report, could dent one of the ALP's biggest revenue sources, with the biggest unions donating \$37.74 million to Labor since 2007.

The Federal Court would also be able to disqualify union officials from office. Yesterday, Senator Cash slammed "intimidation" by Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union officials at a National Press Club debate.

However, the Coalition backed away from Dyson Heydon's strongest measure: giving parliament the power to strip the militant union's law-breakers of office.

The report in December of the two-year Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption recommended “special legislation disqualifying those officers of the CFMEU that parliament considers are not fit and proper persons from holding office ... to combat the culture of disregard for the law within the union”.

Mr Turnbull called an early election to win a mandate to create the Australian Building and Construction Commission, to “clean up” lawlessness by union officials in the construction industry.

Senator Cash said yesterday a Turnbull government would implement the “overwhelming majority” of the recommendations, including setting up a registered organisation commission that would pursue unions where there were allegations of falsifying membership. The government would also give courts the power to stand down union officials who repeatedly break workplace laws. “If ... a person repeatedly breaches corporations law, they get banned by the courts from being a company director. If a person repeatedly breaches the road rules, they get banned ... from holding a drivers licence. The same principle should apply in the workplace,” Senator Cash said. “Secret payments”, with money changing hands between bosses and unions during workplace bargaining, would be a crime.

Labor’s workplace relations spokesman Brendan O’Connor said the Coalition should have released the response earlier: “This has been a phony war that this government has embarked upon.”