

Politics podcast: Brendan O'Connor on Labor's industrial relations agenda

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

With Scott Morrison flagging his government will take a hard line on industrial relations, especially the CFMEU, Labor's shadow minister for employment and workplace relations, Brendan O'Connor will have a tough job ahead of the election.

O'Connor says Labor remains totally opposed to the government's Ensuring Integrity legislation, which the Coalition wants to resurrect. "I can't see this bill in any way being salvageable, and that's why of course it sat for a year without the Senate debating it," he says.

O'Connor acknowledges there have been problems with "civil breaches" by the Construction division of the CFMEU but insists the claims of bad behaviour have been "highly exaggerated". "It is very hard to take this government seriously when it politicises institutions it establishes and uses those institutions for political purposes ... this government really has no standing and no regard for the rule of law when it actually acts unlawfully itself and then wants to attack other institutions for acting unlawfully," O'Connor says.

With his brother Michael the CFMEU's national secretary, O'Connor indicates that in government he would recuse himself from decisions made specifically by the minister – though not from general workplace policy relevant to the union. "I would consider the situation and if I thought there was a perceived conflict or a conflict I certainly would of course absent myself," he said.

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