

Setka gets backing from group of unions as split deepens

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Several unions made a concerted strong stand of support for John Setka on Tuesday, as the executive of the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union discussed the push against its embattled official.

Statements came from the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union Victorian branch, the Electrical Trades Union of Australia, the Rail, Tram and Bus Union's Victorian branch, the Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union, and the Victorian branch of the United Firefighters Union.

Setka, who is the construction union's Victorian secretary, is under pressure on two fronts.

Anthony Albanese is moving to have him expelled from the ALP for allegedly denigrating anti-domestic violence campaigner Rosie Batty and generally bringing the party into disrepute by his behaviour.

ACTU secretary Sally McManus has told him he should resign his union position for causing reputational damage to the union movement. Setka is facing court this month charged with using a carriage service to harass a woman.

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The Setka affair has split the union movement with many unions calling for him to stand down.

He has been backed by the Victorian branch of his union this week called for the national executive to issue a statement of support and instigate an investigation of the leak from the union executive meeting at which he allegedly denigrated Batty – which he denies. If Setka was

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expelled from the ALP all financial support to the ALP from the union's Victorian branch would cease, a resolution said.

The state branch also struck back at those unions which have called for Setka's resignation, saying it "will no longer recognise traditional long-held membership coverage and demarcation lines with unions that have attacked this branch."

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union Victorian branch declared it "strongly condemns any external interference in union matters. Unions are for members, by members, and are not to be used as pawns for political clout.

"John Setka should remain in his position until such a time as the members of the CFMMEU decide otherwise."

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The ETU attacked "the anonymous leak from the CFMMEU national executive meeting two weeks ago" and "the media circus of disinformation which has followed it."

"John Setka has been a tireless leader of the CFMMEU and wider union movement for over 20 years and has always supported his members and advocated tirelessly for their health and wellbeing."

The Victorian branch of the RTBU said Setka "should have a right to a fair trial, the right to address personal issues with his family" and condemned "the conflation of alleged comments leaked from the CFMMEU national executive".

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The PPTEU committee of management denounced “the manufactured leak stemming from the CFMMEU NEX and the anonymous individual behind it. Their actions have caused a great deal of harm to John and his family, as well as the reputation of the general union movement.”

The Victorian branch of the United Firefighters Union said Setka should not resign, “as that is clearly a matter that is decided solely by his members, and not third parties.”

It added in its statement, “With the current public debate, one has to question ‘solidarity forever’”.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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