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Work tribunal under fire

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FOUR current and past unionists are among six new appointments by the Rudd government to Fair Work Australia, prompting employer claims that the tribunal would need to be renamed a "union retirement village".

Workplace Relations Minister Julia Gillard yesterday announced that the national president of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Julius Roe, an ACTU senior industrial officer, Michelle Bissett, and a senior national official with the shop assistants union, John Ryan, had been appointed to the tribunal.

Anne Gooley, a former official with the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, who works with law firm Maurice Blackburn, was also appointed.

Peter Hampton, a senior bureaucrat with the South Australian government and Danny Cloghan, who works in the West Australian Department of Health, after 30 years involvement in workplace relations, will sit on the tribunal.

Steve Knott, chief executive of the Australian Mines and Metals Association, said: "It belies belief that six appointments can be made, and four are well-known current and former union activists.

"Not one outside the legal fraternity with real-life, private sector business experience has been appointed. If this trend continues, FWA will need to be renamed URV —union retirement village."

Ms Gillard said the new commissioners were "fair-minded and capable professionals from varied backgrounds".