



# Employer anger over 'hands-off' strike response

## EXCLUSIVE

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Employers have criticised the Turnbull government and the Fair Work Ombudsman over their lack of response to allegedly unlawful industrial action by workers attending the ACTU rally that disrupted the Port of Melbourne and the city's central business district this week.

With ACTU secretary Sally McManus declaring unions were "just warming up", Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James has refused to comment on tens of thousands of workers walking off the job on Wednesday.

Resource sector employers said yesterday the rally contravened laws, disrupted the city and illegally shut down critical port and transport services but there seemed to be no ramifications for individuals and groups behind it.

"We haven't heard a whisper from those tasked with upholding Australia's laws condemning the unions inciting this action," said Australian Mines and Metals Association chief executive Steve Knott said.

"If the Fair Work Ombudsman with its \$188 million budget and 736 staff wasn't asleep at the wheel, individuals engaging in such illegal action would have been well aware they could face fines up to \$12,600."

Ms James refused to respond

to the criticism yesterday or provide any comment on the rally.

Mr Knott said the "silence is also deafening from the government, which is yet to publicly condemn the illegal industrial action ... If the regulators and government won't even condemn unprotected industrial action that heavily impacts services and businesses in one of our biggest

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STEVE KNOTT  
AUSTRALIAN MINES AND METALS ASSOCIATION

cities, what chance is there of them taking action to deter it in the future?

"With the ACTU saying this rally is the first of many, we have to question if the new industrial environment is one where employees can strike at any time on any matter."

He said the "speak-no-evil approach from those charged with upholding the law will have consequences.

When the likes of left-wing ACTU and newly formed CFMMEU bosses determine which laws in this country need to

be followed or broken, we know what prevails: anarchy."

A spokesman for Workplace Minister Craig Laundy said yesterday the government's "commitment to stamp out illegal industrial dispute is resolute and well known".

"Employers affected by industrial action can make applications to the Fair Work Commission for a 'stop order', and a number have already done so in response to Wednesday's rally," he said.

Stevedores discontinued their action in the commission after the wharfies returned to work.

Mr Knott said the government last year demoted industrial relations from a senior cabinet role, the first time since Federation, to a junior ministerial position.

"This very much feeds into the perception of left-wing union bosses and their followers in the community that compliance with Australia's IR laws is optional," he said.

"The spectre of the Fair Work Ombudsman and the Turnbull government offering no comment pre, during or post the illegal strikes on Wednesday, to attend a pre-orchestrated post-budget political rally that shut down Melbourne's CBD, will surely embolden union activists."

Former Victorian premier Jeff Kennett this week accused protesting unionists of being the "new capitalists of society", saying the union movement's "change the rules" campaign was undermined by the six-figure pay packets of blue-collar workers.