



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 11 November 2021

“COVID-19: the end of our ‘Lucky Country’? Attorney-General & IR Minister Michaelia Cash and Shadow Minister Tony Burke key speakers in debate”

Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations, Michaelia Cash, and Shadow Minister, Tony Burke will participate in the 11th Annual Ron McCallum Debate (virtual) on 18 November at 6pm, with the topic: “Are we still the lucky country? The future of workplace relations in Australia.” ([Register here](#))

Australia’s leading industrial relations think tank, the Australian Institute of Employment Rights (AIER), will bring together some of our key decision makers, and brightest minds, to help forge a new way forward on our key industrial relations issues. And to heed the wake-up call from one of our most perceptive writers, Donald Horne.

In Horne’s writing of the ‘Lucky Country’, he warned that Australia’s success was based on luck, not merit; that Australians were complacent, that their leaders lacked sufficient vision and Australian institutions and industries lacked innovation.

Ahead of the Debate, James Fleming, Executive Director, AIER, asks the question: “Is Horne’s ‘call to arms’ still relevant today? Has COVID-19 brought to a shuddering halt our 30-year run of continuous economic growth and highlighted and exacerbated deep divisions in our society that threaten our sense of well-being and shared prosperity?”.

Attorney-General, Michaelia Cash said today that The Morrison Government is committed to continuing to help businesses create jobs, drive wages growth and improve productivity. “We are already recovering better from the economic impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic than almost every other advanced country in the world. This is the result of decisive action, by governments, individuals, employers and employees. The Coalition’s strong economic management and policies will help Australian businesses and workers thrive, create new jobs for Australians, and ensure business owners and employees work together to benefit from their hard work and sacrifice”.

Shadow Minister Burke responded that: “The pandemic has exposed the prevalence and dangers of insecure work in Australia. Labor wants to build back better with more secure jobs, better pay and a fairer system”.

This year's Debate will question what role the workplace relations system has played in Australia's luck and shared prosperity, and if it is up to the task in its current form. Are the IR stakeholders fully equipped to fulfil their role in facing Australia's challenges? Would workplace relations reforms help Australia make its own 'luck' and to face both the pressing challenges of today and those on the horizon?

Ron McCallum, Emeritus Professor, Sydney University and Patron of AIER, said: "I have always believed in the power of discussion as a means to solving labour relations issues, and this is why I am honoured to have this debate in my name. This year's debate is especially important. After the ravages of COVID-19, and with the challenges of climate change and job displacements caused by artificial intelligence, it is timely to re-set the rules and precepts governing work relations".

Participants

- Michaelia Cash (Attorney-General & Minister for Industrial Relations)
- Tony Burke (Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations)
- Ron McCallum AO (Emeritus Professor, University of Sydney)
- Greg Vines (Deputy Director General, International Labour Organization)
- Michele O'Neil (President, ACTU)
- Andrew McKellar (CEO, Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry)
- Michael Kaine (TWU National Secretary)
- Innes Willox (Chief Executive, Australian Industry Group)
- Justice Iain Ross AO (President, Fair Work Commission)
- Emma Walsh (Founder & CEO, Parents at Work)
- David Peetz (Emeritus Professor, Employment Relations, Griffith University)
- Sanushka Mudaliar (AIER Executive Committee)

AIER Executive Director, James Fleming, is available for interview.

AIER BACKGROUND

As Australia's premier independent industrial relations think tank, the AIER has adopted the principles of the International Labour Organization, promoting the recognition and implementation of the rights of employees and employers in a co-operative industrial relations framework. Its aim is to educate for a fairer system by promoting better industrial relations in the public interest.

RON MCCALLUM BACKGROUND

Emeritus Professor Ronald C McCallum AO is widely recognised as Australia's leading labour law expert and one of the world's leading disability advocates. Ron has been blind since birth and, as he relates in his 2019 Memoir, *Born at the Right Time*, thanks to new assistive technologies and the encouragement of those around him, he became the first totally blind person to be appointed a full professor at any university in Australia. Ron also recounts how he developed his interest in the laws regulating the relationship between employers and workers.

He is a past Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the key global body for disability rights, and was named Senior Australian of the year in 2011. Ron is a patron of the AIER and the debate is named in honour of him and his work.

An audience background paper for the Debate is available [here](#).

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