The Hon Tim Wilson MP

Shadow Minister for Small Business

Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations and Employment

Member for Goldstein

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Topics: Penalty rates, CFMEU, net zero

E&OE

Tim Wilson:

Here’s the reality. We have a record number of business insolvencies in Australia right now. We've seen a rise in unemployment. And of course, we have seen real wages decline under this government. The government has put forward new industrial relations legislation and it is not consulting small business in the way that they should. If anything, a small business needs to be brought into the conversation because they need hope. And when you need hope, the best way to give it is to be part of the conversation about the way forward, and the government isn't providing that.

Last night, the Minister presented to me their draft of their legislation for consultation. We asked simple questions of the Minister. Simple questions like, are we going to get a regulatory impact statement on this legislation to understand the impact it's going to have on small businesses. The answer was simple, no. How many small businesses are going to be impacted by this legislation? And could they give us an answer? No. And what are we going to see in terms of the process to make sure that small business can have input into this legislation through things like a Senate Inquiry process? And it's clear they wish us to ram it through this Parliament.

What we need now more than ever is hope for small business, so they can employ Australians with confidence. The way to do that is to bring them into the conversation and that is not what we're getting as part of this Government. There is a simple reality. There are no penalty rates on jobs that do not exist. The Coalition supports penalty rates. We support higher wages. We support jobs and economic opportunity for every Australian and for small businesses to operate with confidence. But that isn't what we are getting from this Government, with their approach where their focus is how they do their payoffs as part of their legislative victory lap rather than focusing on how to improve the economic conditions that list the standards of living and the wages of Australians. Thank you.

Question:

Labor says it's got a mandate to pass this bill because it took it to the election as one of their key platforms. What do you make of that?

Tim Wilson:

Well this is the Parliament of Australia and part of the Parliament of Australia, just like with every other piece of legislation, is you go through a process. Part of that process is getting an assessment of the impact of legislation and how it is going to impact things like small businesses so they have a voice and you understand the consequences. This is standard. You send things through Senate inquiries so there's proper process and so Australians can have a say in how things are actually drafted. This is standard so they can make the claims about what their mandate may be. It doesn't mean it gives them a right to override the standard processes of legislative passage. I said this morning on radio, the Prime Minister thinks he can go off and start to treat the Parliament of Australia like it's the National People's Congress. He's wrong. People who are elected to this Parliament to scrutinise their legislation, give it proper consideration, and that's all we're asking for as part of a democratic process for this country.

Question:

More broadly, are you concerned that it could effect the independence of Fair Work?

Tim Wilson:

Of course there's concerns that this may undermine the role of the Fair Work Commission and many employer groups have now started to raise that concern themselves, because there's a mixture of independence that's coming into question and of course duplication as well. And of course that is some of the concerns they've raised and they're now talking about the types of amendments they want as part of that conversation. This is why bringing people into the conversation is so important. It's a very reasonable expectation, not just of the Opposition, not just of small business, but of the organisations that are here to represent the employers of the nation.

Question:

Have you started sounding out other groups about a Senate inquiry? I mean, the government doesn't have the numbers to block one on its own.

Tim Wilson:

We obviously talk to parties from across the Parliament and of course we're encouraging them to go on this process but we have work to do because we've got our own internal processes to work through the legislation as well. One of the things we're doing is focusing on going and talking to average Australians who are involved in employing Australians and making sure they understand the consequences. Because while things might, for the Minister, be part of a heady political conversation and they may feel the confidence to go off and pass laws, without due consideration of the Australian people or the impact it has on small business. Most small businesses are focused on making sure they can get their staff into work, that they can go on and operate successfully, they can make sure they can pay those wages so people can go and live their lives and grow their businesses. They're not focused on the war and peace volumes of legislation the Minister likes to pray over day in, day out and add more and more regulations. And so there's a real need to just talk to average Australians and make sure they understand the consequences of this as well.

Question:

You said you're going through your own processes... [inaudible] Hasn't had a look at this yet?

Tim Wilson:

Not at all, we're just simply highlighting our concerns of the process going forward and one of the things we're clearly saying is it's not unreasonable that there's a regulatory impact statement, so we understand the impact, that will help inform our processes of course, but more importantly making sure that the Parliament has due consideration. That's all I've said. It's reasonable, it's consultative and more importantly it brings small business, the employers of the nation into the conversation. Which I would have thought the Minister would actually want if they're interested in growing the economy and turning around the economic sinkhole they're creating. Where we have record business insolvencies, we have declining real wages under this government, and only last week have now seen an uptick in unemployment, which is not the conditions that I want to see. And I sure as hell hope that's not what they want to see, but that is what they have created.

Question:

Tim if this further erodes the ability to negotiate for something like working from home, that could become part of legislation in the future, but that has to be included in contracts in the law as well.

Tim Wilson:

Well, we've said that standards of living isn't just about dollars and cents. Of course, lifting standards of living is about dollars and cents. But it's also about people's capacity to be able to afford the petrol to go and pick up their kids from schools or other flexible work arrangements that works for them in partnership with their employers. And so, again, making sure we understand the full consequences is why we have to bring small business employers into the conversation, as well as, of course, workers, so that we have that solution as part of any legislative framework. So anything that corrodes that flexibility is something we're mindful of and we want to make sure it's factored into that. I'm not going to go on and comment specifically on whether it's going to do that, but these are things you flesh out through these processes. That's why it's so important.

Question:

Tim just to clarify, are you suggesting that this change might have... [inaudible].

Tim Wilson:

Well, I'm simply highlighting that the government has a very serious problem right now where we have unemployment rising. Well, we know, we can talk about the broader economic conditions that we're facing right now. We know the pattern and the trajectory of government policy to date and what the consequences are. Unemployment is rising. Small business insolvencies are rising. Real wages have not gone in the trajectory, which one they promised at the 2022 election. And they want to achieve, I'm sure, at the 2025 election, instead they've gone down. Now is the time to look honestly and assess whether what they're doing is working. And instead what we're getting is ramming legislation through the parliament or aiming to, not bringing the people who employ the workers of the nation into the conversation, and focusing squarely on what we need to do to improve the economic conditions of the nation.

Question:

Mr Wilson, just on another issue, there will be a petition on the table of parliament today calling for proper sanctions on Israel. If the government considers further measures on Israel over the war in Gaza, what would be your reaction?

Tim Wilson:

Well, I'll wait and consider the petition and we'll look at them beforehand, but my position has always been very clear, which is it's important to stand by one, our allies, but more importantly for a country, for any liberal democratic regime to be able to stand up and defend its citizens against terrorist attacks and the organisations that are involved in terrorist attacks. There are still 50 Israelis that are held hostage and a first point of action for a terrorist organisation is to return the hostages that are being held and to make sure that we see a cease in these sorts of attacks on a liberal democratic country.

Question:

Considering continued revelations of the CFMEU's relationship with gangland figures, do you see this debate on IR legislation as an opportunity to lodge an amendment or debate further the issue?

Tim Wilson:

I think they're very different issues to be frank, I mean what we're talking about now is making sure that we secure arrangements to get the best outcome for workers but that doesn't negate the fact that the CFMEU and the continuing issues of corruption remain a live one and are having real and material impacts on Australians and they're paying for it in so many different ways, whether it's in through the increased cost of housing, whether it's through the impact of the amount of money the CFMEU is taking from state government projects, which means every Australian is paying more for projects, which means we're getting less return, less value for money. But frankly, whether it is just directly connected back to the corrupt power core that goes all the way through the patronage network of the corrupt union bosses all the way through to the structures of the Labor Party.

Question:

What would you like to see the government do to tackle this?

Tim Wilson:

Well we outlined and led up to the last election how important it was that we see the reestablishment of the ABCC. We see measures taken to crack down on that. We'll have more to say about that right now, but our focus clearly today is making sure that small businesses, the employers of the nation, are brought into the conversation around the legislation the government has put forward. Because it is so important to address the fundamental problem where we have record business insolvencies, declining real wages and making sure that we have hope and aspiration for small businesses so that they can go on and hire the next generation of Australians because an uptick of unemployment is not the basis of hope for people who want to get ahead.

Question:

You've mentioned that the government's not negotiating with key players in this whole debate around the IR law. Considering they're doing a roundtable today with small business leaders and groups, is that not a positive indication?

Tim Wilson:

Well, they're going to be talking no doubt about a number of issues, but they haven't been doing this structurally as part of their process, and it certainly wasn't flagged to me last night as part the consultation that the Minister was talking about with this legislation. And again, this is the pathway. They can bring it into the Senate process, because people can't just have things sprung upon them and ask. They need to go away. They need practically look at the consequences. They need to consider them in terms of how it's going to work legally, practically on the ground, just simply asking for people's flash in the pan answers on the spot or the moment, is not consultation. It's not bringing them into the conversation. And it's not the basis of trust and the type of trusting relationships you'd want, if you want to get more Australians employed with better paid jobs.

Question:

Just on net zero, why not, Barnaby Joyce is doubling down on his statements and calls to repeal it, thoughts on that?

Tim Wilson:

Well, I've said consistently that the social license of net zero is contingent on having net zero price increases and net zero outages to achieve net zero emissions. What have we got under this government? They legislated net zero, prices have gone up, reliability has become a challenge for the energy grid and emissions have risen. We at the same time have had a member for Kooyong go off and vote for billions of dollars in new coal subsidies. The member for Wentworth has gone off and voted for billions of new coal subsidies. We have had the member for McKellar go off and vote for billions of new coals subsidies. We've had the Member for Curtin go off and vote billions of coal subsidies, so we have a lot of people in this parliament who talk the talk on the Labor and the Climate 200 side on net zero on climate change and then go off and do the opposite and deliver the opposite. What we need is forthrightness and honesty in this conversation, net zero price increases, net zero outages as the pathway to achieve net zero emissions reduction. All good? Thanks, guys.

ENDS