

[ [Previous](#) ] [ [Major News - ACTU Mentions](#) ] [ [Next](#) ]

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## **Unions slam Fair Pay hires**

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The federal government has moved to deflect criticism of its new Fair Pay Commission by appointing a former unionist and a welfare lobbyist to the wage-fixing body, which will meet formally for the first time on Thursday.

But unionists and community sector organisations attacked both new commissioners - former Australian Services Union leader Hugh Armstrong and Mission Australia head Patrick McClure - as being deeply conservative and out of touch with the needs of workers and families.

Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews said yesterday that the two, along with businessman Michael O'Hagan and labour market economist Judith Sloan, would bring a breadth of experience to the commission.

"We have a broad representation, as the government promised, for the AFPC," Mr Andrews said.

"Their combined experience in economics, business, employee relations and community service will ensure the wage-setting process best represents Australia's interests."

But the ASU's NSW branch secretary, Sally McManus, described Mr Armstrong, who was joint national secretary of the union in the early 1990s, as "an old grouper, a Cold War warrior completely out of touch with the modern workplace".

Labor frontbencher Lindsay Tanner, who challenged Mr Armstrong for a position in the Federated Clerks Union during the 1980s, said he was "very socially conservative".

"He comes from the most ultra-conservative antecedents in the trade union movement, and he will have to answer for his decision," he said.

Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union energy division national president Tony Maher described Mr Armstrong's appointment as "pretty pathetic".

Mr Maher said the government had spent months searching for a unionist

willing to join the commission.

Ms McManus said Mr McClure, who is a member of the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership Board, was one of the most conservative employers in the community services sector. "He has been a long-term Howard supporter," she said.

The new commissioners will be led by the chairman of the AFPC, Ian Harper, and will form an independent statutory body responsible for setting and adjusting the minimum wage. They took up their positions as from yesterday and will be appointed for four years.

In parliament yesterday, Labor shifted its question-time strategy to include industrial relations for the first time this year. It followed criticism from **ACTU** secretary **Greg Combet**, who called for the party to focus on workplace issues rather than its internal affairs.

But during a question on IR, Prime Minister John Howard accused Labor leader Kim Beazley of lacking the courage to undertake reforms for continued national prosperity.

Caption :TWO PHOTOS: Mission Australia head Patrick McClure and economist Judith Sloan.

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[ [Previous](#) ] [ [Major News - ACTU Mentions](#) ] [ [Next](#) ]

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