

Daily Media Overview

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Setka's rant makes union crackdown more likely

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Construction union boss John Setka's foul-mouthed tirade against politicians has hardened the resolve of key Senate crossbenchers to pass a version of the Coalition government's bill to crack down on unions. In a tirade to union activists last week, Mr Setka ranted against "f--ing crossbenchers" and warned they would "wear the consequences" if they voted in favour of Prime Minister Scott Morrison's union-busting "Ensuring Integrity" bill.

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Michael Koziol

Construction union boss John Setka's foul-mouthed tirade against politicians has hardened the resolve of key Senate crossbenchers to pass a version of the Coalition government's bill to crack down on unions.

In a tirade to union activists last week, Mr Setka ranted against "f---ing crossbenchers" and warned they would "wear the consequences" if they voted in favour of Prime Minister Scott Morrison's union-busting "Ensuring Integrity" bill.

The bill – which will require cross-bench support in the upper house – would include a public interest test the Fair Work Commission could use to prevent future union mergers such as the one between the maritime and construction unions that formed the CFMMEU.

It would also allow the Registered Organisations Commission to cancel a union's registration on the basis of improper conduct, including repeated breaches of industrial laws and serious criminal offences.

Independent senator Jacqui Lambie has vowed to support the bill unless the controversial Mr Setka quits as Victorian state secretary of the CFMMEU – a threat he has so far defied.

Centre Alliance senator Rex Patrick maintained he would not vote for the

bill in its current form as it "goes too far", but he said Mr Setka's rant – revealed by *The Sydney Morning Herald* on Saturday – had made him more inclined to back an amended version.

"It has hardened my resolve to pass a bill to deal with union misconduct," he said.

"I'm now looking at all offences the CFMMEU have committed or where the Federal Court has found miscon-

duct by the CFMMEU to see what offences are at the heart of proceedings.

"That will give me some guidance as to what the bill needs to focus on."

Senator Patrick and his Centre Alliance colleague Stirling Griff hold two crucial Senate votes. The government needs their votes to pass the bill.

Senator Patrick said he was engaging with Industrial Relations Minister and Attorney-General Christian Porter on the matter.

"I've experienced first-hand now what others have complained about in the construction industry," he told *The Sun-Herald*.

He said he did not want to hurt "well-behaved unions that are helping workers", but Mr Setka's comments were "just not helpful" to the union movement's cause.

Senator Patrick also said that while was an adviser to former Centre Alliance leader Nick Xenophon, he witnessed "a couple of CFMEU members abusing Nick" at Perth Airport.

with Anna Patty



CFMMEU boss John Setka



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Setka defends union official raided by police, sends warning to crossbenchers

Exclusive
Ben Schneiders
Nick McKenzie

Controversial unionist John Setka has defended a key offsider whose home was raided by police last month, saying construction union officials were now facing the situation “where friends can’t help ... friends”.

The home of senior CFMMEU official Derek Christopher was raided by police as part of an investigation into allegations that he received hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of free labour and materials from building contractors to renovate his family home. He has not been charged as yet.

At a meeting of union activists last Thursday, Mr Setka attacked the way police had conducted the raid and the damage done to his young family.

“It’s just f—ing unbelievable. There were more raids than there was in World War II let me f—ing tell you, that’s how f—ing bad it is,” Mr Setka said on a tape leaked from the meeting. He added that police did not understand how the construction industry worked.

“It’s almost become a thing where friends can’t help f—ing friends,” Mr Setka said. “According to these people, that’s now f—ing illegal.”

“If you have your father-in-law come to your house and lay bricks, they say, ‘Where’s the receipt for that?’ Come on, it’s your f—ing father-in-law. Jesus Christ, that’s what it’s become.”

The foul-mouthed tirade, in which Mr Setka also ranted against “f—ing crossbenchers” and warned they would “wear the consequences” if they voted in favour of Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s union-busting Ensuring Integrity Bill, has hardened the resolve of key Senate

crossbenchers to pass a version of the bill to crack down on unions.

Independent senator Jacqui Lambie has vowed to support the bill unless Mr Setka quits as Victorian state secretary of the CFMMEU.

Centre Alliance senator Rex Patrick maintained he would not vote for the bill in its current form as

it “goes too far”, but he said Mr Setka’s rant had made him more inclined to back an amended version. “It has hardened my resolve to pass a bill to deal with union misconduct,” he said.

“I’m now looking at all offences the CFMMEU have committed or where the Federal Court has found misconduct by the CFMMEU to see what offences are at the heart of proceedings.

“That will give me some guidance as to what the bill needs to focus on.”

In August, police raided Mr Christopher’s home and those of several targets of its investigation over allegations that materials and labour had been diverted to renovate his home. As police raided

the family home, they raided a neighbouring property owned by Mr Christopher’s father-in-law, CFMMEU shop steward Frank Prevorsek.

Mr Prevorsek, who is close to Mr Setka, was also at Thursday’s meeting. Mr Christopher’s wife, Michelle Prevorsek, is also employed by the CFMMEU and was also questioned by police. The raids came after a lengthy investigation and a tip-off in March last year where an anonymous letter was posted to detectives at Victoria’s fraud and extortion squad.

“My employer relocated me from a construction site to a domestic house in Keilor Lodge,” the letter alleged, while also claiming the arrangement led to certain builders

being favoured on construction sites around town. “The major builders Multiplex, Probuild, Built all employ contractors of Derek’s choice,” the mysterious author wrote.

“No one will ever speak up,” they added, hinting at the wall of silence that surrounds suspected wrongdoing in the multibillion-dollar construction industry.

Prosecution over circumstances such as these is difficult due to having to prove if the goods or labour were paid for, and the work done legitimately. Former Builders’ Labourers Federation leader Norm Gallagher was jailed for corruption in the 1980s.

The stakes are high for Mr

Christopher and police who have launched several failed criminal cases against CFMMEU leaders in recent years. That included a failed blackmail case against former construction division deputy Shaun Reardon and Mr Setka, who was controversially arrested by police in front of his children.

CFMMEU leaders claim they are being persecuted for their success at pushing up the wages of Victorian construction workers well above rates in the rest of the country.

Mr Setka said the CFMMEU had identified one of the police involved in the raid of Mr Christopher’s house as having previously “bugged” the union’s Canberra office. Mr Setka described the police

case as “absolutely f—ing disgraceful” and an “absolute f—ing witch hunt” and slammed the use of heavily armed police and dogs.

“He’s [Mr Christopher] got nothing to be ashamed of and nothing to fear, we know what’s really f—ing happened, this is the sort of shit these people [police] do.”

Mr Christopher also spoke at the meeting, choking back emotion. He

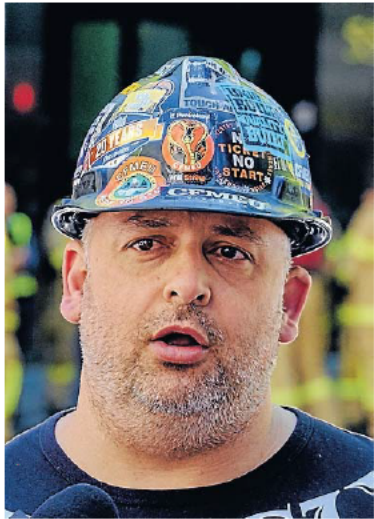


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... said he had been targeted as he was
... a CFMMEU official, and he would
... come after the anonymous leaker.
... “They are out to get this union,
... they are out to get our leader, make
... no f—king bones about that,” he
... said. “I just want to be left a f—ing
... alone to do my job and raise my
... family.”

With Michael Koziol

NATAGE A003



CFMMEU's Derek Christopher.

