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ABCC must be abolished and construction laws should improve OHS and stamp out dodgy contractors

The departure of the head of the Australian Building and Construction Commission clears the way for the abolition of the ABCC, say unions.

The ABCC was set up by the Howard Government and has been an abject failure which has led to poorer safety standards in the industry, said ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence.

“Under John Lloyd the ABCC engaged in politically partisan behaviour that is inconsistent with its obligations as a statutory body,” Mr Lawrence said.

“Mr Lloyd has constantly overstepped the line required of a public servant, making comments that betrayed the bias of both himself and the body he headed.

“Any pretence of fairness was long discarded under Mr Lloyd’s tenure. His legacy will be an ordinary building worker, Ark Tribe, facing the prospect of jail simply for exercising his right to silence.

“The end of his term today is an appropriate time for the Government to begin abolishing the ABCC, which is one of the final remnants of WorkChoices still standing.”

Mr Lawrence said a report by the International Labour Organization earlier this year found that the ABCC was likely to be in breach of a number of international labour standards, including freedom of association, the right to organise and collective bargaining.

“Industrial laws are intended to protect the rights of workers, not undermine them,” Mr Lawrence said. “The priorities of the ABCC should be to strengthen workplace health and safety in the building industry, and to stamp out dodgy contractors who avoid their obligations to employees and to the tax system.

“But overwhelmingly, the ABCC has investigated and prosecuted workers for exercising their rights rather than employers.

“Both the injury and fatality rates in the construction industry are much higher than for all industries – the death rate is twice that of the rest of the workforce.

“In the year to date, an appalling 17 construction workers have been killed on the job.

“And just last week, there were reports of migrant Korean tilers being worked to death by unscrupulous employers who hire illegal workers. But again there was silence from the ABCC.

“The ABCC has wasted millions of dollars while health and safety in the industry has not improved. There should be one set of laws for all workers, regardless of the industry they work in.

“The Federal Parliament must vote to abolish the coercive powers that impinge upon civil liberties and the right to be members of a union.”

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