

Senate report confirms need to abolish coercive powers in building and construction industry

Unions have welcomed the recognition by a Senate committee today that there is no place for coercive powers in any workplace and that all workers should be subject to the same laws.

A report of the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee inquiry into the *Building and Construction Industry Improvement Amendment (Transition to Fair Work) Bill 2009* has backed union concerns that coercive powers in the industry are an infringement of civil rights.

“The overriding principle is that there should be one set of laws for all workers, regardless of the industry they work in,” said ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence.

“We remain absolutely opposed to the continuation of coercive powers that clearly impinge upon the civil liberties and rights of people, or upon the right to be members of a union.

“There are established laws to deal with criminal behaviour, but additional coercive powers in the construction industry are oppressive and an infringement of basic rights.”

The committee’s majority report said:

The coercive powers should not have a continuing role in the enforcement of workplace laws. The ultimate goal must be the regulation of the building and construction industry under the same laws as the rest of the workforce. (page 4)

Mr Lawrence said big construction companies and property developers wanted to retain unfair laws in the industry because they stood to gain financially from laws that reduced workers’ rights.

“The Australian Building and Construction Commission was set up by the Howard Government to undermine the rights of 900,000 hardworking Australians who every day risk their lives on building sites around the nation and play a major role in driving the economy.

“We need to make the construction industry one in which people want to work and feel valued for their contribution – not one in which they face the possibility of compulsory interviews and potentially even jail simply for attending a union meeting.

“We welcome the fact that the Bill proposes to abolish the ABCC as a separate institution, and will continue to campaign for equal rights for all workers and the removal of coercive powers in the construction industry,” Mr Lawrence said.