

## Editorial & Opinion

# Defenders of bullies' rights

**Scott Barklamb**

Allegations of corruption within Australia's largest construction union reflect the lawless and intimidatory culture from which the more militant elements of the trade union movement approach their role in our workplace relations system.

While a restored Australian Building and Construction Commission will properly enforce the law, we also need to deal with day to day union bullying on individuals.

Less than a month after the start of the new national anti-bullying jurisdiction, the CFMEU is standing up for the "rights" of its members to bully, abuse and belittle fellow employees.

The CFMEU is set to appeal to the High Court a decision that a coalmining company legitimately dismissed an employee who held up a sign abusing non-striking workers as "scabs" with "no principles" and "no guts".

"Scab", "dog" and "mongrel" are hate words, deliberately used to bully people. Such abuse should not be considered acceptable, simply because it is seeking to intimidate workers to toe the union line.

This type of abuse is no more acceptable, and potentially no less harmful, than some of the abuse that gave rise to our anti-bullying laws.

It should have no more a place in modern Australia than racial, sexual or religious slurs.

AMMA has consistently maintained that if the new federal anti-bullying system is to stamp out bullying, it must extend to the conduct of union officials, members and supporters. Ambiguity arises from statutory protections against dismissal and discipline on the basis of union activities.

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