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The trail of union intimidation of women must be stamped out



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Where is Luke Collier? The police want to talk to him. The government wants to talk to him. Fairfax Media wants to talk to him.

Collier has a criminal record, a long history of intimidating women, and his history also includes a trail of protection from his union and, indirectly, the Labor Party.



Illustration: Michael Mucci

He is on bail on a charge of aggravated assault, for allegedly attacking a woman and breaking her arm. Earlier this year, he was convicted of assault, again for an attack on a woman.

The Fair Work Building Commission (FWBC) has moved to revoke Collier's right to enter worksites because of a series of instances of intimidation, including the harassment of women.

Collier also made an appearance in the Interim Report of the Royal Commission in his capacity as an organiser for the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). According to the

commission's report, while he was on the Barangaroo construction site in Sydney last July he called a female inspector from the FWBC a "f---ing slut".

He also used a megaphone to broadcast the name and phone number of another FWBC official, in front of scores of CFMEU members, and encouraged them to call the number. He then shouted at the official, "You think all I got is your phone number?".

Collier spat at another FWBC staff member, then said "Lick it up you f---ing dog".

At another work site in Sydney last year, at Wollli Creek, a female FWBC official says Collier spat at her.

With all these matters in Sydney, and numerous people wanting to interview Collier about them, my understanding is that he has removed himself to Western Australia.

Has the CFMEU sacked him? No.

Collier's boss, Dave Noonan, the national assistant secretary of the CFMEU, wrote a letter to the *Herald* on May 27, which the Herald published on May 28 (after the removal of several verifiably false claims), in which he gave this undertaking: "There is no double standard by the CFMEU on the issue of violence against women.

"The CFMEU has taken a strong and public position against violence towards women and condemns the kind of threatening behaviour that [the director of FWBC] alleges. We will not stand by an official where there is evidence they have engaged in this kind of behaviour."

Noonan's letter made no reference to Collier. It challenged evidence given against the CFMEU's Victorian Assistant Secretary, Shaun Reardon.

On May 28, the CFMEU followed this up with a media statement after Reardon's conduct was raised in Parliament: "Senator [sic] Christopher Pyne's allegations ... made in Parliament today, have no foundation in truth ... Mr Reardon has never made late night threatening phone calls to FWBC staff.

"The White Ribbon Foundation of which Mr Reardon is an ambassador conducted their own investigation into these allegations ... [and] found there was no basis to continue the suspension and noted that these allegations were made under parliamentary privilege.

Someone is lying, and lying brazenly, given the spectacular divergence between the CFMEU's claims and the evidence presented before senate estimates hearings.

Senators have heard that Reardon made three phone calls late at night to a female inspector's mobile phone, the last call logged at 11.23pm. An anonymous flyer was then circulated referring to the woman as a "dog" who wanted to be a "pole dancer". The flyer gave the name of the woman's husband, her home address and home phone number. A number of threatening calls were made. One caller said, "You're a f***ing rat". Another caller said, "Me and my seven mates are going to come and f*** you."

As for the claim that the White Ribbon Foundation conducted an investigation, here is the *Hansard* record from last week's senate estimate hearings:

Senator Bridget McKenzie (Nationals): "As part of their investigation did the White Ribbon organisation speak to you?"

Nigel Hadgkiss, director of the FWBC: "No Senator."

Senator McKenzie: "Anyone in your organisation?"

Hadgkiss: "No Senator."

Senator McKenzie: "Did they speak to the staff member that Mr Reardon is alleged to have called?"

Hadgkiss: "No Senator."

• Several exchanges later, Senator McKenzie: "Are you able to tell me how the inspector knew that it was Mr Reardon who was calling her?"

• Hadgkiss: "She had Mr Reardon's telephone number and it came up on her phone."

Senator McKenzie: "So there is no doubt that Mr Reardon made those calls?"

Hadgkiss: "No. The matter was reported to the Victoria Police."

Senator Doug Cameron (Labor): "I raise a point of order. Is this a trial? How can Mr Hadgkiss make these claims against an individual if the police have not investigated them?"

At the same hearing, evidence was given of the intimidation of a female FWBC staffer by another CFMEU official, John Setka.

Hadgkiss: "Mr Setka and Mr Reardon made a number of sexually derogatory remarks ... She found three missed phone calls from Mr Reardon and one missed phone call from Mr Setka, who left a sexually derogatory message on her telephone ... "

Throughout these and other exchanges, Senator Cameron has asked hundreds of questions over the past year, questioning accusations which have not been tested in the courts. The tenor of his cross-examinations and points of order has always been to challenge the impartiality and/or reliability of the Fair Work Building Commission, never the CFMEU.

Ultimately, the person with executive responsible for the actions of Dave Noonan, and the long trail of unsavoury incidents attached to Collier, Reardon, Setka and others, is the national secretary of the CFMEU, Michael O'Connor. He's their boss.

Labor, and the CFMEU, have made a great noise condemning violence against women, but this moral posture is being rendered empty by the denial and avoidance around this deepening scandal.

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