

SATURDAY



CRIMINALS

John Setka and his militant building union are in the crosshairs

BLACKMAILING bully or harrikin champion of workers? John Setka, the Victorian secretary of the powerful Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, polarises opinions more than most senior politicians.

The number one target at this week's royal commission in Melbourne has been accused of running his union like an army and

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being the head of a criminal conspiracy. But the man himself makes no apology for what he calls his "passionate fight for safety".

On one point, all sides agree: Setka has wielded enormous power in Melbourne.

His union has had a virtual monopoly on the supply of labour on building sites. Almost every apartment and office block under

construction in the city, with the exception of Grocon's sites, have a strong CFMEU presence.

No ticket, no start. But how he has wielded this power, and how the union came by it, is now the subject of explosive commission hearings.

Mr Setka was once an official with the Builders Labourers Federation, deregistered in 1986 by then Labor premier John Cain following claims of corruption and

intimidation aired at a royal commission.

Now, decades later, history appears to be repeating itself.

There's another royal commission — the third since the '80s — and there are calls to deregister the CFMEU.

Some would argue the CFMEU is merely the BLF rebranded.

On Wednesday, jaws dropped at the commission when Boral chief executive Mike Kane entered the

witness box and spent 30 minutes giving evidence.

The Bronx bruiser said Mr Setka had blackmailed his company, costing it \$8 million in 18 months.

The dispute? Boral refused to stop supplying concrete to Grocon sites. Grocon is owned by Mr Setka's arch enemy, Daniel Grollo.

That was the tip of the iceberg of claims against Mr Setka, who looks to be in the inquiry's crosshairs.

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