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THE Rudd Government's workplace laws will delay the start of construction projects and increase costs by promoting union interference in workplaces.

Construction companies have warned the proposed laws, which will be considered at Senate hearings starting today, will also promote turf wars between rival unions.

But the ACTU yesterday accused business of scaremongering, claiming employers were spreading misinformation because they were a "cheer squad" for John Howard's Work Choices.

And building industry unions have urged the Senate to ease planned restrictions on union entry into workplaces and workplace bargaining.

In a submission to the Senate inquiry into the Fair Work Bill, the Australian Constructors Association said the legislative changes had the potential to delay the start of construction projects.

The association claims that a company starting a major project faced new obligations to notify and potentially negotiate with a large number of unions.

"Any union would have the ability to apply for a bargaining order and substantially delay the settling of a project agreement and the commencement of work," it says.

The association said the bill gave a union the right to enter a construction project that was covered by an agreement with another union. "The bill, as presently drafted, will undoubtedly lead to an outbreak of coverage disputes in the construction industry," it said.

The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union said the bill fell short of Labor's pre-election promises and Australia's International Labour Organisation obligations.

The union called for limitations on pattern bargaining to be removed and said penalties for unprotected industrial action were "largely a replica of Work Choices" and should be substantially amended.

The "highly restrictive regime" covering union right of entry to workplaces should be amended, including the removal of the provision requiring 24 hours' notice.

ACTU secretary Jeff Lawrence said he hoped the Senate inquiry "would put to rest the scaremongering and misinformation that has been spread by hysterical and self-interested employer groups who were the cheer squad for Work Choices".

He said the bill should be amended and passed by the Senate as soon as possible to safeguard workers from exploitation and discrimination.

"Malcolm Turnbull and the rest of the Liberal and National parties must accept that Work Choices was the main reason they lost power over a year ago, and the election gave the Rudd Government a mandate to abolish the legislation," he said.

In its submission to the inquiry, the ACTU says Labor's main broken election commitment concerns the limit on what workers and employers can bargain about and include in a workplace agreement.

"The bill prevents workers from bargaining for better unfair-dismissal protections and for improved access to advice and assistance from unions in their workplace," Mr Lawrence said.

"Additionally, the right to request flexible work for family reasons is meaningless if an employer can still refuse on business grounds without any right to review; and the scope for multi-employer bargaining needs to be made consistent with international labour standards."

The Civil Contractors Federation, representing 2000 contractors employing 40,000 workers, said unions should not have the right to inspect the records of non-members, and union right of entry into workplaces must be tied to employment of members.

In a submission to the inquiry, the federation says the bill undermines the key principle of freedom of association by giving preferential rights to unions, whether sought by the employees concerned or not. "What we see is a philosophy of re-regulation of the labour market in a number of key areas when the economy needs as much flexibility as possible," it says.