

# Construction workers' blacklist: Cable to meet information commissioner

Business secretary's intervention over blacklisting of workers signals growing concern among ministers



📷 Vince Cable wants to discuss 'how best to handle any evidence of any ongoing blacklisting that might emerge'. Photograph: Luke Macgregor/Reuters

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## Matthew Taylor

Tue 29 Jan 2013 17:17 GMT

The business secretary, [Vince Cable](#), is to meet with the information commissioner to discuss how to handle the growing scandal surrounding the "blacklisting" of thousands of construction workers and environmental activists.

In a [letter](#) to Christopher Graham, Cable said the practice, which [left thousands of builders and electricians without work](#), was "unacceptable and illegal" and acknowledged it may still be going on. The letter, which was copied to several government departments on Monday, is a sign of the growing concern among ministers over the issue.

"I would like to meet with you to discuss how best to handle any evidence of any ongoing blacklisting that might emerge, drawing on your experience of the original investigation into the Consulting Association," Cable wrote.

More than half of the country's leading construction firms were using the blacklist run by the Consulting Association in 2009 when the operation was shut down, paying an annual £3,000-a-year subscription plus £2.20 for each blacklist check.

Many of those on the list were forced into destitution because they could not find work and earlier this week it emerged that the same organisation was running [a separate blacklist on environmental campaigners in an attempt to disrupt direct action campaigns on major development projects](#).

Cable acknowledged in the letter that the scandal now went "well beyond the issue of blacklisting of trade union members for which I am responsible". He added: "I would welcome your view on how these matters might best be taken forward, and how best to ensure that any investigations by different authorities are best co-ordinated."

The information commissioner carried out the investigation into the Consulting Association in 2009. In parliament last week it was described as a "secret, insidious, shameful practice" and there were allegations that the police and security services had supplied information.

**Ian Kerr, chief officer of the Consulting Association, told the Scottish affairs committee last year** that firms had used the blacklist in relation to series of high-profile public projects including the Olympic Park, Portcullis House in Westminster, the Admiralty, the Ministry of Defence HQ in Whitehall and Wembley stadium.

**Kerr**, who had been monitoring trade unionists and political activists for more than 30 years, said construction firms had also wanted information on environmental protesters after being "badly hit" by their campaigns at high-profile road building projects in the 1990s.

On Tuesday, the shadow business secretary, Chuka Umunna, welcomed the decision by Cable to meet the information commissioner and he called on anyone with any information to contact the Scottish affairs committee.

"It is welcome that the government has recognised the need for blacklisting to be looked into further - this is precisely why Labour called for a full investigation in our opposition day debate in the House of Commons last week.

"We will work alongside ministers to ensure blacklisting allegations are fully investigated and to examine what changes are needed to strengthen the law against blacklisting so that this scandal is never repeated again."

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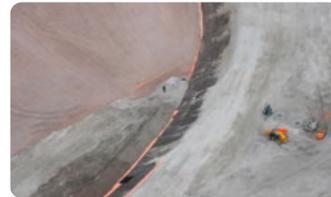
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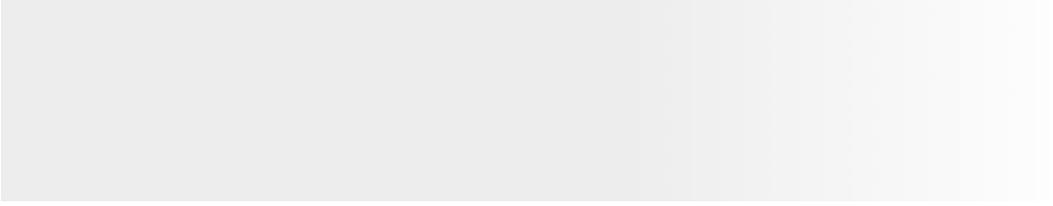
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