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Sex discrimination has no place in workplaces; Qantas and other employers must lift their game

Australian employers, including some of the nation's biggest companies, must lift their game to end sex discrimination in the workplace and improve pay and opportunities for women, say unions.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said a sex discrimination case on behalf of 14 sacked female Qantas/Jetstar employees was a harsh reminder of the kinds of barriers women still face to equal participation in the workforce.

Ms Burrow also warned that women were among the worst affected by WorkChoices and Liberal leader Tony Abbott's plan to reintroduce WorkChoices would mean more cases of discrimination like today's.

The Transport Workers Union today launched an application in Fair Work Australia to reverse a recent decision by the airline to bar the women from 47 new permanent positions created at Sydney Airport. The TWU case argues that the women were directly and indirectly discriminated against because Qantas/Jetstar froze all women out from retraining while male employees were offered jobs and subsequently rehired.

Ms Burrow said the alleged behaviour by Qantas was appalling and illustrated the problems that women have in the workforce.

"Here we have Qantas, an Australian icon, that has been accused of discriminating against its female employees. Major national companies like Qantas that employ thousands of women should be playing a lead role in providing a workplace that is free from discrimination, that pays women equally, and gives women opportunities for promotion.

"If this is the way that a leading company like Qantas treats its women employees, then it is clear that Australian employers need to undergo a massive cultural change if women are to achieve equal pay and opportunities for promotion."

TWU National Secretary Tony Sheldon said the actions of Qantas management were like a throwback to the 1950s.

"Women's pay is well behind men on average, and they have fewer career opportunities but here we have an Australian company that won't even give them a job," Mr Sheldon said.

"Qantas/Jetstar is a unique brand and it is a brand all Australians can be proud of – but the actions of their executives in this case is disgraceful.

"These women are someone's wife or mother or sister, and they deserve to be treated with dignity."

With average female pay still at least 17% lower than for men, unions are meeting in Melbourne today to plan a major national push for pay equity, more opportunities for women, and improvements to superannuation for women.



australian council of trade unions

media release

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