

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus' address to the Senate Committee on the Turnbull Government's proposed "Ensuring Integrity" Legislation on Thursday, September 28 in Melbourne at Parliament House of Victoria.

This is an extreme and dangerous bill.

It is opposed in the strongest possible terms by all affiliates of the ACTU.

It will undermine and weaken Australia's trade unions as that is what it is designed to do. This bill is what some very powerful employers want, these corporations already have too much power and too much influence over the Government. The people who will be the victim will be working people who are already suffering with 40% of people in insecure work and the lowest wage growth in recorded history.

This bill is all about double standards. It ensures there is one set of laws for those big corporations, many who are donors to the LNP, who will face little scrutiny and minimal enforcement, and another set of more onerous and harsh laws for working people and their unions.

All unions are not for profit, member run organisations. The average union has about 18 000 members, revenue of \$6 million, around 30 staff and is largely run by unpaid volunteers from the industries that union represents.

This is very different to corporations run for the profit of their shareholders with corporate boards that pay their Directors large board fees – often as much as a full-time salary. The Commonwealth Bank Executive was collectively paid \$50 million per year, 16.6 million customers and a total income of \$23.1 billion.

Yet this bill imposes harsher and more onerous obligations on unions than apply to the Commonwealth Bank.

Our submission details all the ways this bill imposes a higher and harsher standards and punishments on unions and union officials than big corporations.

Despite these very significant differences, unions are already subject to more regulation and harsher penalties than business since the establishment of the Registered Organisations Commission and the ABCC. Unions are not like corporations in purpose or operation. We are more like associations.

You have to ask yourself, why is the Government so obsessed with imposing extreme rules on unions?

Why when the Commonwealth Bank has had 54 000 breaches worth \$1 trillion in money laundering?

Why, when we seen so many politicians stood aside for corruption – over a dozen in NSW in one year?

Can you imagine what we might find among property developers if we launched a \$100 million Royal Commission into that sector?

But you won't find the Government going after the people who fund them or creating special laws to sack their CEOs and wind their companies up.

It is because the bill has nothing to do with integrity, and everything to do with attacking the only organisations workers have to standing up to the power of these companies and ask for pay rises and secure jobs. We are the only balance in the system.

The only people who should have the right to decide how member based organisations, like unions should be run, are their members.

Politicians should not be able to interfere in the running of member based organisations like unions, sports clubs or the RSL.

It is unAustralia and undemocratic.

Unions play a vital role in any democracy. We are a check on power for employers and for governments. This means some Senators may not always like what we say or do, but without unions playing this role our democracy is diminished.

Those countries that interfere in the internal operations of unions are authoritarian: Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, China. This has no place in Australia.

This Bill will impact on thousands of working people who are officials of unions. It will impact on the 1.6 million ordinary working people who have chosen to be members of unions and it will impact on all working people as the work of unions flows onto all workers, whether they be members or not.

Every day, unions work to protect their members' jobs, their wages and their working conditions. They negotiate agreements and are there to uphold rights and to be there when their members need them. For the thousands of volunteers and paid staff and officials, this is a hard job performed in difficult circumstances nearly always with employers with more resources and power.

Working people voluntarily join their unions and pay money so they have an organisation that can perform this difficult work, and try and get a fair go by balancing the inherent unequal power relationship between employers and employees. They vote for their leaders and who represents them.

Unions are an essential part of a healthy democracy. When the work of unions is made harder, all working people suffer. Today in Australia we have record low wage growth, high levels of insecure work, very low number of strikes.

It is not a coincidence that a time union density is low, inequality is at a 70 year high.

Most OECD countries recognise the public good of unions and support their work. But since the Abbott-Turnbull Government have been in power they have been unrelenting in their attacks on working people and unions.

This bill continues this political attack on working people, it imposes onerous, intrusive and severe penalties and obligations on unions that will make the job of unions even harder, threaten to take away the representation of unions from some workers entirely and inevitably mean working people's money will be unnecessarily diverted into expensive legal proceedings instead of supporting their members.

This extreme bill goes even further than the politically motivated Heldon Commission. It attempts to bring in laws even Dyson Heydon chose not to recommend. It proposes laws that are entirely unsupported by policy or evidence.

All unions are deeply concerned and emphatically opposed as you can see from the submissions you have received.

I urge Senators to put a stop to the Government's ongoing campaign against working people and their unions and instead focus their time on supporting good steady jobs and badly needed pay increases.

These attacks on working people and their unions must stop.

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