

Tuesday 18 June 2019

Equal pay fight continues fifty years after landmark case

On Wednesday the peak body for working people will celebrate five decades since the 1969 landmark equal pay case.

The case was brought by women union members in the public service and meat industry.

One of the advocates in the case was ACTU industrial officer Bob Hawke, who would later become Prime Minister.

The case abolished the right of employers to discriminate against women by paying them 25 percent less than men for performing the same work and laid the foundation for a 1972 case that mandated that women be paid 100 percent of the male wage.

It was the first of a series of victories for working people on equal pay, but five decades on the full-time gender pay gap is more than 14 percent and women are still fighting.

The current rules are still weighted against working women, with only one successful equal pay case in the last 30 years.

Recent efforts on behalf of early childhood workers have been frustrated by a requirement from courts for a suitable male comparator.

Equal pay requires the Federal government to amend the Fair Work Act, reverse penalty rate cuts and establish dedicated pay equity panel in the Fair Work Commission.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

“Five decades ago working women in Australia took a massive step towards equality. The important principle of Equal pay for equal work was won.

“Now, in 2019, we are determined to continue their work.

“The full-time gender pay gap is still over 14 percent, and women working in feminized industries still have their work systematically undervalued compared to men.

“As we honour the women who led the charge for equal pay and observe this anniversary, we are also fired with a new resolve to achieve equality for working women.

“The Morrison Government refuses to take any action to address equal pay. Instead they support next week’s cuts to penalty rates which will disproportionately hurt women.

“And to change the laws that stand between women in Australia and fair pay. Australian unions will continue the fight for genuine equal pay.”

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