

Wednesday 9 February 2022

## **Morrison ignores industries in crisis, tries to rush through dangerous Religious Discrimination Bill**

Every worker has the right to a safe, healthy and respectful workplace, regardless of their religion, race, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, disability, age or other personal attribute. The ACTU supports amending federal anti-discrimination law to protect workers from unlawful discrimination because of their religious beliefs or activities - this protection for workers could be easily achieved. Instead, the Morrison Government has introduced a confusing and divisive Bill which will increase discrimination against workers and make workplaces less safe.

The Bill will override all other Federal, State and Territory discrimination laws to protect discriminatory religious 'statements of belief', even if they are offensive, inappropriate, and harmful. For example, working women who are subjected to sexist and hostile statements by their employers may be deprived of the right to complain about discrimination.

The Bill also places workers at risk of repercussions if they speak up for themselves or their colleagues or seek union assistance, as it hands broad powers to employers to "preference" workers based on perceived religious differences, overriding existing state and territory protections. Outside of a handful of specific religious roles, workers should never be hired or fired on the basis of their religion, or lack of religion.

The Morrison Government is pushing through its ideological Religious Discrimination Bill while failing to take urgently needed action in aged care or address any of the other crises caused by inaccessible and unaffordable RATs.

### **Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:**

"Three years ago Scott Morrison promised Australians an orthodox anti-discrimination bill that provided protections for religious belief equivalent to other protected attributes. Instead, as the sun sets on this Parliament, he is bringing forward a confusing and divisive bill that will increase discrimination and make workplaces less safe.

"The Morrison Government's 'statement of belief' provisions contain extraordinary measures that will increase discrimination, foster division and disharmony in workplaces and must be scrapped. The Bill removes the protections that exist for workers against this type of behaviour in Federal, State and Territory discrimination laws.

"Many of the workplaces that will be most impacted by the extreme provisions of this bill are in the aged care and education sectors. These sectors are currently grappling with a crisis brought about by the Morrison Government's failure to manage the pandemic and could do without this needless distraction.

"The specific override of state and territory laws applying to religious educational institutions winds back protections for LGBTQI+ teachers and school staff and must be removed.

“Teachers are extremely concerned about the discrimination they will continue to face under this Bill but also the impact on their students of it allowing ongoing discrimination against children on the grounds of their LGBTQI+ status.

“With less than 10 sitting days left of parliament the Morrison Government is trying to rush through the religious discrimination bill before the election. We call on Mr Morrison to stop playing politics and listen to the majority of Australians who do not support the bill. All members of parliament should oppose this Bill in its current form.

“The mental health and rights of working people are threatened by the religious discrimination bill which will enable humiliating, offensive and harmful comments about women, LGBTQI+ people, people with disability, and anyone from a marginalised community.”

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