

Friday, 4 September 2015

Build a better future for Australian women

Equal Pay Day today acknowledges the 65 extra days the average Australian woman works each year to earn the same wages as a man.

The ACTU calls upon the Government to act now to build a better future for Australian women and close the gender pay gap. Women are now earning on average \$285 less per week than men and retire with an average of \$90 000 less in superannuation.

The Abbott Government's response to gender inequality has been appalling. Tony Abbott is threatening to remove access to paid parental leave from 80,000 new mothers, slash family tax benefits and attack the lowest paid women by reducing minimum wages and penalty rates.

Furthermore, under the Government's Fair Work Amendment Bill women will be forced to trade off their own entitlements in return for family friendly hours of work.

There is a desperate need to increase support to women returning to work. Australia's workforce participation for women with young children falls well below the global OECD average.

One of the key challenges in addressing gender inequality is that women are under-represented in positions of influence. Only 20.1 per cent of ASX 200 Board positions are held by women, whilst parliamentary representation fails to meet the United Nations minimum standards of 30%. Just 10% of senior leadership roles in the Abbott Government are held by women. Yet, despite the frontline effects of GPG, Tony Abbott refuses to act.

To ensure the gender pay gap does not continue to grow the Government must act now on:

- Improving the current Paid Parental Leave Scheme to ensure working parents have access to 26 weeks of government-funded paid leave
- Increasing funding for childcare and introducing new family friendly working arrangements for employees returning from parental leave
- Abandoning its plans to reduce family tax benefits
- Revoking Fair Work legislative proposals to allow employers to ask women to trade off wages and conditions in return for family friendly hours
- Boosting the Workplace Gender Equality legislation and reporting requirements
- Resisting calls to reduce minimum wages and cut penalty rates

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Ged Kearney:

"Tony Abbott needs to focus on passing legislation that will make a positive difference to Australian women in all working positions."

"Women are facing outdated workplace practices and inadequate laws that make it difficult to return to work after having children."

"Tony Abbott's response to this is to make things worse for working women now, and when they retire."

'Simultaneously cutting wages, penalty rates, parental leave and family support payments leaves low paid women and those with caring responsibilities in an impossible situation.'

"Australian families should not be forced to choose between their babies and their jobs."

"As Mr Abbott said himself - a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme is the obligation that a serious political party owes to modern society –it's clear he was not serious."

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