

Bill takes aim at workers' rights

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Legislation presently before federal Parliament represents a grave threat to unions and the fundamental human right for workers to organise and act collectively.

By design the Ensuring Integrity Bill is essentially union-busting legislation, allowing the Federal Court to impose a range of orders including disqualification of an officer, deregistration of a union, alteration of a union's eligibility rules, restriction of the use of union funds or property, and more.

A "union officer" is defined broadly and includes local sub-branch representatives. The Federal Court would be able to impose the same suite of powers — including findings against the union, officers or members — for offences such as filing union paperwork late with a government authority.

Key to the passage of the Bill are the votes of two South Australian Centre Alliance senators, Stirling Griff and Rex Patrick. The ACTU has waged a media campaign calling on the Centre Alliance to stand up for working people and block the Ensuring Integrity Bill.

If passed, the legislation would automatically disqualify any person who has committed an offence — under federal, state or territory law or that of another country — from holding a union position.

It would also allow the Federal Court to disqualify someone from holding a union position on a wide range of grounds, including not being a "fit and proper person" to hold office, for example, if they are caught twice driving without a licence.

Federation General Secretary John Dixon said the Bill is fundamentally about attacking unions — all unions — and eroding workers' rights.

"No other democracy has laws like this, which fundamentally take aim at the rights of workers and union members," he said. "If the Ensuring Integrity legislation passes into law, working people will lose power in their workplaces, making it even harder to get pay rises and raise concerns about safety and wellbeing."

The Government has stated it is close to making a deal, which includes an amendment to install a demerit system similar to that imposed on driving licences.

"No amendments to this Bill will prevent it from making workplaces less safe and making it harder for all working people to win pay rises and protect current working conditions," Mr Dixon said.

