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Daily Media Overview



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New bill breaks law, says ACTU

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The Morrison government's proposed laws making it easier to deregister unions and disqualify union officials breached two international conventions to which Australia is a signatory, ACTU-commissioned research by the International Centre for Trade Union Rights has found.

The ACTU said the findings showed the Coalition was willing to break international law to pursue its "extreme and dangerous agenda against unions".

But Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter dismissed the research as having no credibility, saying the Ensuring Integrity Bill's explanatory memorandum stated it did not impinge on any international obligations.

The centre's research says the bill creates sweeping powers for interfering in trade unions, which were incompatible with Australia's commitments under the International Labour Organisation's Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention.

"We find no precedent for the degree of state interference in the functioning and establishment of trade unions in comparable industrialised liberal democracies," the research's authors say.

They say the bill's draconian measures were "characteristic of some authoritarian regimes in which independent trade unions are suppressed or entirely prohibited". The bill, they say, was more oppressive than Turkey's laws that target unionists.

The research says the pro-

posed sanctions against unions threatened to destroy the careers of individuals "or the very existence of workers' organisations".

"The Ensuring Integrity Bill appears cynically designed to encourage deeply damaging interference in trade unions' activities by using (even minor) instances of unlawful behaviour as an entry point and justification," it says. "Taken as a whole, the legislation spells a serious threat to trade union democracy."

Mr Porter said the findings had no credibility as the report was ACTU-commissioned and conducted by a trade union organisation. "The bill has one very simple objective and that is to ensure that registered organisations covering both employer and employee organisations operate according to the basic standards of integrity and according to the law," he said.

Mr Porter said construction union the CFMEU had no respect for the law, as evidenced by 75 of its officials being currently before the courts, and \$16.4 million in penalties being imposed on the union. He said no union or employer organisation would have any possible disadvantage under the proposed legislation "so long as they do not break Australian laws".

