

# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

## PRESS RELEASE 501#

### RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT:

#### RELIGION: A STATE WITHIN THE STATE

Labor's Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill which is currently before the Senate offers religious employers open slather. It has long been a problem for teachers. It is now becoming a political issue.

DOGS are not surprised. They have always said that centuries of religious conflict led the Men of the Enlightenment to realise that

- If you break the principle of separation of religion and the State ;
- If you give public funding to religious institutions;
- If the State becomes entangled with the State;
- If the State endows religion with taxpayer funding

Then :

- Discrimination against minorities;
- Inequality;
- Separation and discrimination against children, employees, the vulnerable;
- The pillaring of society; and
- Civil discord ;

are the inevitable result. Our ancestors learnt this lesson and placed the First Amendment in the American Constitution and its equivalent, Section 116 in the Australian Constitution. But our High Court, in 1981, turned Section 116 on its head. Australia, with religious leaders flexing their political muscles – at public expense, is now doomed to learn the lessons of history all over again.

Those interested in the rights of the vulnerable and minorities are starting to wake up.

**David Marr in The Age and the Sydney Morning Herald 14 January 2013**

<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/gillards-bizarre-act-of-faith-leaves-vulnerable-unprotected-20130113-2cnf0.html> deals with the immediate implications of the State giving in to powerful religious interests. They are free to discriminate against employees on the basis of religious belief and lifestyle even though they offer the taxpayers services at public expense. For them we now have '**Discrimination Legislation.**'

Marr's article attracted 588 comments and 63% agreed that religious bodies should not be permitted to discriminate against employees on the basis of religion, sexual preference, lifestyle choice etc.



**David Ewan Marr** (born 14 July 1947 in [Sydney](#)) is an [Australian](#) journalist, author, and progressive political and social commentator. His areas of expertise include the law, Australian politics, censorship, the media and the arts. He writes for [The Monthly](#) and until recently [The Sydney Morning Herald](#) and appears as a semi-regular panelist on the [ABC](#) television programs, [Q&A](#) and [Insiders](#). (Wikipedia)

The following is the way he sees the current level of unfairness and hypocrisy which DOGS believe results from entanglement of religion with the State – at taxpayers' expense.

He wrote:

*I hesitate to say this but the Prime Minister is living in sin. I don't give a damn. Nor do most Australians. But that sort of thing bothers religious leaders. So much that Labor's Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill will renew their authority to bar anyone in Julia Gillard's shoes from any job in any of their schools, hospitals and charities, even those they run with public money.*

*It's a curious spectacle, a prime minister legislating against herself.*

*Only school funding is as heavily defended by bishops, orthodox rabbis and imams as the "freedom" to punish these sinners in the workplace.*

*Should she wish to work some day as, say, a cleaner in an Anglican hostel, she could solve the problem by marrying. But the woman who will be shepherding the legislation through the Senate really hasn't a hope. The new law will back any faith-based organisation that refuses to hire Penny Wong if having a lesbian on the payroll injures "the religious sensitivities of adherents of that religion".*

*This is not a summer spoof. Nor is it a distant symbolic issue like gay marriage. This is here and now. The bill is before a Senate inquiry. At present it will leave unprotected a long list of ordinary Australians working or wanting to work with some of the biggest employers in the country.*

*Most conservative faiths have most of the following on their lists of the sackable: gays and lesbians, single mothers, adulterers - yes, even adulterers! - bisexuals, transsexuals, the intersex and couples like Gillard and Tim Mathieson.*

*Zealots call this a necessary exercise of their faith. Only school funding is as heavily defended by bishops, orthodox rabbis and imams as the "freedom" to punish these sinners in*

*the workplace. Struggles over this are subterranean, largely unreported and almost always successful.*

*The issue spooks politicians. They know even the faithful don't enthusiastically back their leaders on this one. But grappling with bishops and rabbis complaining about threats to religious liberty is about the most unwanted contest that a government can imagine.*

*Plucky little Tasmania stripped religious bodies of the "freedom" to sack sinners from schools, hospitals and charities more than a decade ago and there are no reports from the far side of Bass Strait that their Christian mission has suffered.*

*Britain tried to do much the same in 2010 and was denounced by Pope Benedict - he claimed the Labour plan "violates natural law" - and wound back by Anglican bishops in the House of Lords. But under British law discrimination was already forbidden when religious bodies were spending public money. Secular function, secular rules.*

*Not here. Labor has given up on all this without a fight. Other countries and other Australian states have sweated over legal formulae to balance the demands of the faiths and the needs of the vulnerable. But It's a bigots' charter.*

**As one of the commentators on the 'thread' said:**

*The people mentioned, Steve H. don't necessarily 'actively oppose' religion but they do pay taxes that are used in ever increasing amounts to fund these religious beliefs through their schools, nursing homes etc. **The novel idea of publicly funded organisations being subject to public law should be the principle employed here.***

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/gillards-bizarre-act-of-faith-leaves-vulnerable-unprotected-20130113-2cnf0.html#ixzz2IH3qCR3z>

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