

The recent announcement by Julia Gilliard of a nationwide review on workplace bullying was so well received, it was almost disturbing— it seems that the culture of harassment and stand over tactics within Australian places of employment is so engrained and accepted that the detractors of this government initiative were few, and their criticism at relatively low volume.

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Quite recently, the story of _____ began to generate buzz within Australia's social media circles, despite the apparent reluctance of mainstream media to become engaged in the hierarchical warfare of our public service departments.

By his supervisor's own admissions, with the evidence corroborated by formal reports, _____ had been consistently "performing well" in his role with the _____. He's worked in the Canberra-based department for the better part of a decade. A quiet but contentious man, he admits that this is the only job he has ever wanted to do, and he relocated his wife and very young family to the ACT on finishing university specifically to cater to this career.

A fairly typical Aussie guy, _____ forfeited his weekend rugby games and essential time with his kids in order to advance his employment— putting in the extra effort that is an unspoken requirement of being a 'good employee' in this country.

It was during late 2009 and early 2010 that unfounded accusations of sharing classified information were leveled in _____ direction. While _____ issued him with a 'letter of regret' over the incident, the subversive harassment continued and union officials report that the tone in meetings and other forms of communication between _____ and his superiors became increasingly hostile.

It was last year, 2011, that _____ first took medical leave for severe depression. While ComCare, the relevant workers compensation providers, declared his workplace a significantly contributing factor to his illness, they have a 'no fault' policy and no blame was laid, or compensation sought.

_____ return to work in late 2011 was plagued with accusations of poor conduct from senior staff members and inflexibility within his senior management in regards to providing a safe and secure work environment— every employer's ethical duty of care to those in their employ.

Currently on his second round of medical leave for depression, the [redacted] has instructed [redacted] that his claims of stigmatization are invalid and further claims will result in disciplinary action. On his return to work, he will be blocked from receiving any training or promotion within the Department for a period as yet undetermined– it could be as long as three years.

While stating that a blanket ban on individuals returning from medical leave is 'policy', no formal evidence of such a policy existing has been presented, despite numerous requests.

On this story breaking in the social medias, the general reaction from readers was subtle disgust overladen with a cynical acceptance that this conduct is to be expected within Government departments and all layers of bureaucracy, not only within our country's capital but in our state departments as well– those employed within our public sectors often work under a cloud of silence and passive aggression.

Transparency in workplace practices is always welcome, and Gilliard's review of workplace bullying is timely, significant and valid. But it needs to focus its attention on sectors that are publicly known for using discrimination and stand over tactics– the Government's own recruitment, advancement, internal complaint handling and ethical practice policies in particular.

Is that even possible, with the current culture of terrified silence that surrounds the topic; when people are too afraid to put name to their experiences for fear of covert retribution? When the best advice anyone within the public sector can give [redacted] is to change jobs, change departments, walk away and don't make a fuss?

Results of the review, due out in October, may provide a clearer picture– But don't go holding your breath. Given the current atmosphere, it may take more than one government review board to break the covert ranks of conspiratorial silence that surrounds this bizarrely underground, curiously Australian phenomenon.