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STC management 'ignoring staff safety', says entertainment union

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance will today (Thursday) take the Sydney Theatre Company to the Fair Work Commission over concerns that STC management is putting its commercial interests ahead of the health and safety of its staff.

Two recent alleged assaults of staff working at the Sydney Theatre Company have highlighted how vulnerable and sometimes dangerous working with the public can be.

On two separate occasions this summer, ushers at STC have been assaulted by patrons.

MEAA director of Entertainment, Crew & Sport Mal Tulloch said the incidents had left staff feeling violated, humiliated and isolated.

Following a meeting called by the union in late-January, MEAA members are incensed that management has not taken the assaults seriously and continue to put theatre patrons ahead of their duty of care to provide a healthy and safe workplace.

In the first incident, an usher was forcibly pushed by a patron. The second incident involved a member being forcefully slapped on the back a number of times and then subjected to an offensive gesture. In both occurrences, staff had followed the STC procedures, and had done nothing to provoke the incidents.

But the aftermath of these incidents highlights that the existing policies, incident reporting and dealing with violent patrons is inadequate. Furthermore, the victims of this violence felt isolated, frightened and felt lack of support by their employer.

One of the perpetrators was a season ticket holder and a well-known patron to the STC. Management had accepted an apology and allowed the patron in question to continue to enter the premises.

Mr Tulloch said the MEAA has demanded the patron be barred from the venue indefinitely.

He said the employees affected have been discouraged from making formal complaints and management has rejected an offer from the union to work together to develop new health and safety procedures for similar incidents.

"There is no excuse for violence in the workplace," Mr Tulloch said.

"There has been inadequate consultation from management to determine a safeguard for our members and our efforts to see better procedures for dealing with violent patrons have been ignored by the STC.

"We are appalled and alarmed that STC is willing to put a paying patron's bad behavior above the safety of its staff."

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