



Speech by

CAROLYN MALE

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Hansard 29 November 2001

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (12.42 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2001. Its objectives include the prevention and elimination of discrimination in employment. Nearly 100 years after women marched in the streets to gain equality in the form of the right to vote, we still see a situation whereby women's pay is not on a par with men's.

Whilst there has been an improvement, there is still work to be done. Following the recommendations of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission inquiry into the issue of pay and equity, the minister has moved quickly to see all recommendations implemented. All new Queensland awards and agreements will have to ensure that pay equity forms its basis. We are talking about equal remuneration for men and women who perform work of equal or comparable value. Existing awards will also be reviewed. What could be fairer than that?

This same process applies to all types of workplace agreements to ensure gender equity when it comes to pay. I was also pleased to see that set minimum wages for all employees will be enshrined in legislation via the requirement that a full bench of the commission must annually set a minimum wage for all employees, including those not covered by an award.

While we strive for equal pay for women, we must also keep in mind that there are a number of issues of equal importance to all women—working and at home—that still need to be addressed; issues such as access to affordable child care, domestic violence, family support, equitable taxation, equal access to employment, and the eradication of discrimination in services and expenses. The legislation that we are debating goes some way to addressing some of the systemic discrimination faced by women in the work force. I look forward to playing my part in helping to find a solution to those other issues.

I come now to what the coalition usually offers when it comes to industrial relations. Will they be standing up for the worker? Will they be standing up for a fairer, more equitable system where an independent umpire makes the final decision on industrial matters? If the past record of the Borbidge-Sheldon government is anything to go by, the answer is a resounding no. Once again, the member for Caloundra has been running down the unions and their role in industrial relations and their role in standing up for the workers. Where are all the opposition and crossbench members when it comes to this debate? I see there are only two on the list to speak. It is not a very good record.

Does anyone remember who was the white knight for the coalition on industrial relations under the Borbidge-Sheldon government? The former member for Clayfield. Poor Santo! He still has not forgiven the people of Clayfield for dumping him for a much better looking, although rather shorter, alternative.

Ms Boyle: Much more intelligent as well.

Ms MALE: Very intelligent; a member who has a keen sense of social justice and is willing to help everyone, not just Liberal Party cronies, as Santo used to do. Santo is still threatening to inflict himself on the good people of Clayfield again. No-one deserves that! Even the Liberal Party Leader, Bob Quinn, wants to be rid of Santo. He has said that he does not want the old duds like Santo, Davo and Denver back in the parliament. It will be a crucial test of Bob Quinn's leadership if Santo or one of his cronies or clones wins preselection. If he does win preselection, we will know that the member for Robina has been rolled again by the Santoro-Carroll faction and it will mean the beginning of the end for the member for Robina.

Speaking of factions, it is amazing that the Liberal Party keeps denying it has factions. A lot has been said about Labor's factions. At least we have structure, control and purpose behind our factional system. The Liberal Party factionalism is based purely on personality and is much more vicious than anything seen in the Labor Party. That viciousness really came to light during the preselection circus in Ryan. The mentality behind the Liberal Party factions seems to be kill or be killed, and winner takes all. The Liberal Party takes that same view on industrial relations—a view which is fully supported by the National Party. I, for one, will never forget Reith's thugs and dogs on our wharves.

A Government member: Shame!

Ms MALE: It is a shame. The crux behind the coalition's industrial relations policy is individual workplace agreements where a worker has to negotiate the best deal they can with their employer. If a person does not have enough bargaining power or is not a good negotiator, then bad luck; they stay on the bottom of the pile while others clamber on top of them.

Ms Barry: And if you are a woman.

Ms MALE: Forget it! It is the basic policy of the coalition in all its policies. If someone is strong enough, has all the right connections, or—even better still—is born into money, they will do very well. For the rest of us, it is a case of 'Better luck in the next lifetime'.

The major flaw in this system of individual workplace agreements is that the rich keep getting richer and the worker continues to get duddled. There are some employers who have the best interests of their employees at heart. However, profit is the bottom line for most businesses, and if they can squeeze a bit more out of workers' wages and entitlements, then so much the better. Only through collective bargaining can a fairer outcome be reached.

We have seen it all before. When a business goes under, individual contracts mean little and you can kiss your entitlements goodbye. Who do the workers call on for help? Certainly not the Howard government. They call on the unions and they call on the Labor Party. Without the unions maintaining the pressure during the collapse of Ansett, workers would have received little from the Howard government. Why should John Howard care? His brother was not on the board of Ansett. It is just another corporate collapse brought on by tough economic times and hard-line federal government policy. It is part of the philosophy of the National and Liberal parties: if you can't survive, too bad.

It must always be remembered that the federal coalition government has presided over the most regressive regime of industrial relations this country has ever seen. Workers across Australia have seen their hard-fought-for working conditions and pay marginalised. We have seen a move away from awards which provide a safety net for workers to the fragmented system of workplace agreements that I have outlined above—workplace agreements that disempower a large number of our workers, the hardest hit being women, casuals, young people and non-unionised workers.

The Beattie Labor government is concerned about the pay and conditions of all Queensland workers. The Beattie Labor government has demonstrated its commitment to workers by introducing the Industrial Relations Act 1999 in the previous parliament, by commissioning the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission to undertake the pay equity inquiry, and by putting a lot of work into the amendments in this bill. This bill will greatly assist the workers in my Glass House electorate and the workers of Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.
