



Speech by

Hon. GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Unfair Dismissal Laws

Hon. G. R. NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.21 a.m.), by leave: The Federal Workplace Relations Minister, Tony Abbott, has announced his intention to change the Corporations Law to take over responsibility for unfair dismissals, the right of entry to workplaces and the management of disputes in all Australian workplaces. This is simply a cynical and cheap political attempt to take over the industrial relations jurisdictions of the Labor states and to bring us all down to the lowest common denominator. It seeks to exempt a significant number of workers from protection against unfair dismissal, exclude unions from workplaces and provoke further confrontation in Australian workplaces. When Mr Abbott's predecessor, Peter Reith, first floated the same idea four years ago, he received no support for national change, just as Mr Abbott is unlikely to receive any support for his proposal.

The proposal has serious flaws. It fails to address the many significant legal and practical difficulties that this approach would cause. At a basic level, even if the broadest view is taken, the corporations power can only be applied to employees of constitutional corporations. In Queensland, this would leave more than one-quarter of our workers not covered and we would still need separate state laws to protect those people. The result in this circumstance would be a more complex system of overlapping jurisdictions and extensive damage to existing industrial relations institutions. It would do irreparable damage to our workplaces and to our communities. The Queensland Labor government supports a fair and balanced approach to industrial relations, which includes protection for the low-paid and disadvantaged workers that the federal coalition seems intent on suppressing even further. Evidence of that is this state Labor government's in principle support for the Australian Council of Trade Unions living wage case application.

I was particularly pleased to hear that the Australian Industrial Relations Commission awarded its highest ever flat wage increase for federal award workers last week and the highest percentage increase in over 20 years. That is good news for low-paid workers, and I am pleased that this government has played some small part in that. In contrast, the federal government only supported a \$10 a week increase in award rates for people employed up to the C10 level in awards, which would have excluded many workers who currently only receive minimum award rates of pay. The Queensland industrial relations system is working well. I invite the federal government to take a leaf out of our book and work with both employers and unions as well as the state government to improve its workplace relations framework based on the success that we have achieved here in Queensland.

The Queensland system has promoted stability and economic growth through a climate of industrial harmony. Under our laws, industrial disputation remains among the lowest of the Australian states, which helps to promote economic prosperity and jobs growth in this great state. In addition, unfair dismissal applications remain at an all-time low. Mr Abbott should go back to the drawing board.