



Speech by

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FEDERAL WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr WILSON (Ferry Grove—ALP) (10.28 a.m.): The House has cause for celebration this morning. The Howard government's latest attack on workers was brought to a crashing defeat in the Senate Monday night of last week. Senator Santo Santoro's ideological twin, federal Minister for Workplace Relations, Tony Abbott, has been bullying the Senate to pass the Workplace Relations Amendment (Termination of Employment) Bill 2002. This bill would apply to all workers employed by corporations throughout Australia. Without consultation or the agreement of the states, it would have abolished the power of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission and the commissions in other states to reinstate workers wrongfully dismissed where the employer's action was deemed by the state commission to be harsh, unjust or unreasonable.

Approximately 55 per cent of 1.8 million Queensland workers are covered by state awards and a significant number of this group is employed by corporations. For nearly 100 years the Queensland commission has successfully exercised its power in this area. Abbott's bill would force the workers who have been unfairly dismissed to go to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in an effort to get their jobs back.

Labor and the minor parties defeated this bill because, firstly, Abbott was also significantly restricting the grounds on which a worker could be reinstated under the exclusive federal laws. Secondly, the federal laws were a complex nightmare for workers, a sanctuary for irresponsible employers and a goldmine for lawyers. Thirdly, the federal commission's procedures were slower compared with the straightforward state system which is easy to access, especially in a highly regionalised state like Queensland. Fourthly, the loss of the state unfair dismissal jurisdiction would seriously undermine the long-term viability of the Queensland commission.

It is time for the Howard government to take off its anti-worker, anti-union blinkers. It is time for the members of the National and Liberal parties in this House to get stuck into their federal mates rather than, through silence and inaction, aid and abet yet another attack on Queensland workers.