



Speech by

**Lindy Nelson-Carr**

**MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA**

Hansard Tuesday, 22 November 2005

---

## FEDERAL INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LEGISLATION

**Ms NELSON-CARR** (Mundingburra—ALP) (11.56 am): Australian workers are heading into what may be the fight of their lives just to keep their basic rights at work. The federal government's proposed changes to the Australian industrial relations system will have a critical impact on workers and their families. Changes that unions have fought and won for workers to improve working conditions and entitlements are under serious threat. I am very proud today to rise in this place in support of the parliamentary day of action organised by female Labor parliamentarians. I join with my brothers and sisters to send love and best wishes to Bonny Barry whose passion and vision made this day possible. She may not be here in person but you can bet your bottom dollar that Bonny is with us all in spirit.

**A government member:** She is listening on the Internet.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Good on her. Hi, Bonny. Howard's IR reforms have awakened Australians to the harsh realities of what lies ahead. This is a very sad day for working families in Australia. The harsh and draconian attack on lower income earners can only bring down our standard of living and in so doing put enormous pressure on all the social consequences.

And who are the biggest losers in this fiasco? Women. Women in low-paid casual employment, women with children, women with children in child care. This means, of course, that families will go backwards. Many are already struggling just to keep their heads above water. Secure work, secure hours and secure wages will be a thing of the past. Women have fought so hard to get this far. Whilst women acknowledge how far we have come in 100 years, we realise we still have a long way to go. Well, I guess we will have to think again. Never before has there been such a backward step. Unfortunately, as I said, women will be the major losers with the changes.

Part-time or casual working women will be particularly vulnerable to this new system. Australia-wide, women make up 60 per cent of employees in highly award regulated industries such as tourism and hospitality, retail trade, health and community services. The changes are expected to have a disproportionate negative impact on women affecting advances in pay equity, employment rights, such as paid maternity leave, superannuation, penalty rates for casual employment and work and family entitlements, unfair dismissal rights and the loss of the independent setting of minimum award wages. It will be more difficult to juggle work and family if they are forced into lesser conditions and entitlements.

All the major gains made for women such as maternity leave, equal pay and parental leave have come through test cases before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. When its powers are limited, such cases may not be heard in the future. Research shows that under AWAs there is a decline in maternity leave or paternity leave entitlements. In 2004 only 11 per cent of AWAs included maternity leave—paid or unpaid—and only 70 per cent referred to paid maternity leave at all, with an average length of leave at 6.1 weeks. There were no maternity leave provisions for casual workers under AWAs—the majority of which, of course, are held by women.

The changes to increase the use of AWAs would appear to compromise the Australian government's commitment to balancing work and family practice, which disadvantages working parents. I ask members to imagine what will happen when children are sick or, God forbid, the parent gets sick. What will happen to

all of those many volunteer parents who work at children's sporting events on weekends but will now have to work?

The reforms will also have an impact on people receiving unemployment benefits. The federal government has confirmed that dole recipients who reject job offers that exclude penalty rates, holiday leave loading and other conditions will lose their payments. Why would someone want to take a job with no penalty rates, no pay for overtime, no redundancy pay, no parental leave and the threat of getting sacked if you do not comply? What is the state opposition's stance on the IR reforms? You can bet that it will be conflicting.

The Senate inquiry that is being held into the IR changes is one of the shortest on record, yet these are the biggest changes to Australia's workplace laws in 100 years. The Howard government is simply not listening, nor does it care. The 15 November national day of action was one of the biggest ever workers' meetings in Australia. To suggest that it was a meaningless protest only confirms what we all know: Howard misleads, tells untruths and does not care a jot for working families who are the backbone of our society. Today I urge women to take notice. The realities of these changes are ugly, unnecessary and dangerous.