

FEDERAL INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CHANGES

305. Mr A.P. O'GORMAN to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection:

What is the state government doing to protect Western Australian workers from the disgraceful industrial relations changes threatened by the Howard federal government?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

I thank the member for the question. It is clear that all members have some concerns about this issue. That has been reflected in a motion that was carried by this house; that is, that this house is very concerned that the Howard government should be seeking to overthrow a state industrial relations system that has worked well for 100 years. We do, of course, part company with members opposite on some aspects of that, but there is clearly concern about the commonwealth government overriding an area of state responsibility. On this side of the house, we see much more than just the issue of state's rights. We see that the Howard government, in the model it is proposing, is clearly about lowering wages, reducing employment conditions and attacking job security.

Mr T.R. Buswell interjected.

The SPEAKER: Unfortunately, I have to call the member for Vasse to order for the first time.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: This is not speculation. We know that this is what the Howard government is about because its model is very much the same as the one Court and Kierath delivered here in Western Australia under the previous government. That means that when the present government was elected in 2001 Western Australia had a minimum wage that was some \$50 a week lower than that in the rest of Australia. A state that is the leading economy in the nation had the lowest minimum wage by \$50 a week. We also saw the lack of job security under that system. That is what Howard is seeking to foist upon the people of Western Australia. It is something that the government will not countenance. This government has clearly indicated that it is totally opposed to the Howard government's attempt to take over the industrial relations system, and it will work with a range of community groups - unions, churches and the rest - to try to make that message very clear. We have seen today that another Liberal senator, David Johnston, has indicated that he also has some trouble in voting for that legislation. We hope that the Liberal senators from Western Australia will recognise not only that this legislation is an attack on state rights but that it has the potential to reduce working conditions, lower wages, reduce job security and undermine the strength of Western Australia's economy by attacking consumer confidence. The issue is about looking after Western Australia, and therefore events like the union rally next Thursday is supported by the government. We will look to a whole range of other measures that will enable us to show Canberra that following the example of the Court-Kierath government in Western Australia is a failed experiment. It will not serve the interests of the people of Western Australia, and the Gallop government will continue to maintain its stance in support of the workers and the families of Western Australia.