

UNFAIR DISMISSAL SYSTEM, FEDERAL PROPOSAL

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

I refer to the Howard government's proposal to take over the state's unfair dismissal system and reduce job security. What effect will this proposal have on Western Australian employees?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:**

There is certainly great concern not only among members on this side of the chamber, but also throughout the Western Australian community at the attempt by the Howard government to remove access to any form of unfair dismissal proceedings for employees of companies with 100 or fewer employees. That will mean that in Western Australia about 99 per cent of employing companies will be exempt from unfair dismissal laws. The figures I have indicate that 65 per cent of employees in Western Australia will not have access to unfair dismissal proceedings. The changes that we made in 2002 -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** Have you ever run a business?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I have employed people, but I have not run a business.

Several members interjected.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** The Deputy Leader of the Opposition might feel that there are problems with unfair dismissals. The government made changes in 2002 because we realised that the unfair dismissal procedures under the state Industrial Relations Act were not as good as they could be. The Liberal Party said at the time that that would open the floodgates for unfair dismissal cases. In fact, the number of unfair dismissal cases under the state industrial relations system has reduced by about one-third following those changes. We put in place a reasonable and proper system, so that if people were dismissed in a manner that was harsh, unjust or unreasonable, they had an opportunity to have their case heard in the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission. When that system is removed, not only employees but also employers will suffer, because the confidence that people have in their job security very much relates to consumer confidence and whether people can buy a house or make major investments in items such as a car. The Howard government will remove the confidence that people have in their security of employment. Not only will the implications of those changes make it very difficult for many employees, but also the changes will have a negative impact on the economy in this state, because many people will feel that they are under threat.

The other big issue for employees is that many more people will be killed or seriously injured at work. If employees have a boss who is not interested in safety - fortunately, those bosses are in the minority - and those employees know that raising a safety issue means that they could lose their job and have no recourse for reinstatement, employees will not be willing to speak up. They will not be willing to point out matters that must be addressed to improve health and safety in the workplace. The impact of that change on employees will be quite disastrous. This is another example of the Howard government losing sight of the key issues of secure and safe employment. It is simply running a political ideology that does not serve the interests of employers, except for a few of its mates, and it certainly does not serve the interests of families in Western Australia.