

FEDERAL INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LAWS - IMPACT ON STATE SYSTEM

63. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Employment Protection:

Mr Speaker -

Several members interjected.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Steady!

Will the minister comment on the claims on page 4 of *The West Australian* of 27 March that the federal government will take over state industrial relations systems and that the minimum wages will no longer be set by the Industrial Relations Commission?

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER replied:

I thought the member for Collie-Wellington was going to test the new laws by going on strike and not asking the question. I am glad he got it out.

Several members interjected.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: He has been known to test things before. The claim in *The West Australian* is wrong. We will retain a state system. We estimate that up to 40 per cent of Western Australian workers will remain under the state system. Federal estimates are that about 20 per cent will do so. My estimate is that if the Western Australian workers were given a choice, very close to 100 per cent of workers would want to remain under the state system.

When these federal laws were foisted upon us, we were told by Howard that they were simple and unified. Simple? I spoke to an IR lawyer this morning at a breakfast function. He was shaking his head over the 1 252 pages of legislation and explanatory notes and 592 pages of regulations. That is simple! The lawyer was shaking his head. He said the new laws are so complicated that he cannot believe how the federal government had the audacity to say the new laws were simple. Maybe they were written by simple people. When we were debating this matter in this chamber, the supposition by both sides of the house - to be fair to members opposite, I was beginning to think the same thing - was that Howard would look after the battlers who had voted for him during the past two elections. Well, he has failed them. He has reverted to type: the leopard has not changed his spots. The first chance that he had to show his mettle was when the Western Australian government applied to have a state wages case that would have given the lowest income earners in Western Australia an increase of approximately \$20 a week - the exact amount is to be decided. What did John Howard and the federal government do? They opposed that. They did not want those people on the lowest income to get an increase for at least another 12 months. Since then, of course, we have heard that workers in Melbourne who have been dismissed can go back to their employment on lower wages and under different conditions. Now we see headlines to the effect that unionists will be sacked under new laws. These unionists are fathers and husbands to people in this great land of ours. They fought for democracy to join an organisation. Now they are being sacked because they had the audacity to join an organisation of their choice.