
**INDUSTRIAL ARBITRATION ACT AMENDMENT BILL
(SECOND READING)
16 November 1921**

Edith Cowan controversially sought the access of wives to the Arbitration Court and the possibility of payment for duties as required for domestic servants.

Mrs. COWAN: (West Perth) [8.33]: I do not wish to support this Bill at the present time for the simple reason that I think it would be better to wait until we can bring in satisfactory and conclusive amendments which are badly needed to the Arbitration Act. It would have been better if some attempt had been made to get the Government to bring down a Bill of this description than to deal with the question piecemeal in the way we are trying to do. I realise that there are plenty of men in this House to deal with the questions which have arisen with regard to Clause 2, but if the Bill is proceeded with I intend to move an amendment which stands on the Notice Paper. I do not know whether I am in order in reading it now.

Mr. Speaker: No. The hon. member may refer to it, but she can deal with in Committee.

Mrs. COWAN: The amendment is the only logical corollary to bringing household workers under the Act.

Mr Speaker: The hon. member is in order in discussing it, because domestic servants are mentioned in the Bill.

Mrs. COWAN: I think it will be a great mistake to eliminate the words mentioned in paragraph (b).

Mr Munsie: Let the poor girls work for anything the "missus" likes to give them.

Mrs. COWAN: I do not wish or suggest such a thing. Why should not married women have a union? Why should they be cut off from the same privileges? I do not think members of the Opposition would wish that their wives should be cut off from the same standing and privileges as a domestic worker will enjoy.

Mr. Corboy: I would sooner have her as a partner than as an employee.

Mrs. COWAN: This is my reason for giving notice of the amendment. If the Bill were passed, a woman doing domestic work would be forced to do more than ever, and she should have a reasonable wage and be able to apply to the Arbitration Court for proper hours, payment and so on. No man, when he marries a woman, asks her to be anything else but his wife and the mother of his children. He does not ask her to be the cook, the housekeeper, the cleaner, the scrubber and the washerwoman. Therefore, if we are to bring any section of household workers under the Act, I maintain that logically, and in justice to the married women, they have a right also to be brought under the Act and have their hours, etc., dictated by the judge, before whom they will have an opportunity to state their case. Of course, they will not be bound to go to the Arbitration Court. They need not be bound by the Arbitration Court if they do not wish it. If it is good for the housemaid and cook to go to the Arbitration Court, if it is good for the washerwoman to go to the Arbitration Court, it is equally good for the wife to do so. That is my reason for giving notice of the amendment.

Mr. Teesdale: We shall have a revolution.

Mrs. COWAN: That is perfectly true. I have heard it stated in this House that there are some things which can only be put right by a revolution. Consequently, if measures of this nature are brought down, we must expect revolutions. Logically, that is the only thing which can happen. If the privacy of every home is to be invaded by people going in to see whether the wages book is properly kept and whether the time sheets are properly kept, I am not objecting to it if it is considered to be the proper thing; but I want to see that the wife gets a time sheet, and the husband will then have to keep it together with the wages sheet, and the wife will have her proper hours day and night. She will not be bound to go to the Arbitration Court if she does not wish to, and she will have a very much better time than ever before. I must ask this House to consider seriously these amendments to the Arbitration Act. They are serious and may possibly deal a blow to home life.

Mr. Lambert: Then why make them a laughing stock by your amendment?

Mrs. COWAN: The member for Roebourne (Mr. Teesdale) said we shall have a revolution. It is time we had a revolution in that respect —

Mr. Simons: Will the court be asked to define the duties of a wife?

Mrs. COWAN: But let it come by degrees, if possible. I stand for the women of this State.

Members: No.

Mr. Marshall: You do not stand for my wife's cause, anyhow, and I will see that she does not go to the Arbitration Court.

Mrs. COWAN: The hon. member, judging by his tone and the remarks he made here one night, is probably one whose wife might be most happy and pleased if brought under the Arbitration Act.