



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEES

**Employment, Workplace Relations and
Workforce Participation Committee**

Report

SPEECH

Monday, 14 March 2005

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker OÖÇÖConnor, Brendan, MP	Question No.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (12.36 pm)—I rise to also to remark upon the report being presented this morning *Working for Australia's Future: Increasing participation in the workforce*. I concur with the Chair of the Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation that there were many recommendations agreed by all committee members. It is important to note that the effort by the committee commenced in the last parliamentary term and has involved many members, new and old. The focus for all members was to find ways to suggest to the government how we can have a work force where everyone who wishes to can participate fully and which allows for, enables and assists those people who are not in the work force—or not in it as fully as they would like—to participate more fully.

I hope that, of the 23 recommendations, the 20 which were unanimously agreed upon provide some assistance to the government in this important area of public policy. Many members involved themselves with this committee. Other than the current members on the committee to date, there were also the members for Brisbane, Swan, Calwell and, I am sure, some others. Certainly I have been assisted as deputy chair by all members, but in particular by the members for Canberra, Watson and Shortland.

The dissenting report was—it may come as no surprise to you, Mr Speaker—the culmination of concerns raised by opposition members during the course of proceedings. In particular, our concerns went to the recommendations that would affect industrial relations in this country. We do not accept the view that the evidence suggested that there was any particular causal link between diminishing award matters and increasing participation in the paid work force. We do not accept for a moment that there was evidence that suggested that the best way to improve participation in the work force was to remove current entitlements of Australian workers thereby making their work even more precarious than it is. I think it is important to note that the evidence clearly showed that over the last 20 years our work force has become the most casualised work force in the world. We have the greatest casualisation rate and we have a large proportion of workers who are in part-time work. Those part-time employees would, in the main, like to be employed more fully. So we did not accept the majority view that we should be diminishing employees' entitlements in relation to the award. We think that was a misnomer.

We certainly do not agree that we should be placing too much pressure on people on disability pensions. We do accept that there is a need to remove disincentives in the system. We do accept that the tax system and the welfare system do not work so effectively as to ensure that people who wish to work will work, because of the inbuilt disincentive of what they have to pay in tax if they are on some form of support by government. So we do accept that there are areas to be focused upon, but we do not accept, for example, that the Job Network disability support pension pilot was indeed as successful as government members have suggested. Indeed, it was from a very brief sample. (*Time expired*)

The SPEAKER—Does the member for Deakin wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?