



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Workplace Relations**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 18 March 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Chesters, Lisa, MP

**Source** House  
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**Responder**  
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**Ms CHESTERS** (Bendigo) (10:08): Today, I rise to highlight another example of the exploitation of temporary overseas workers occurring in our country. This one also involves Fair Work Building and Construction and is a case of this government shooting the messenger—the CFMEU. At the end of January 2015, the CFMEU uncovered another example of serious breaches of our immigration and industrial laws pertaining to a group of workers on 457 and 400 subclass temporary work visas. Through raising the issue with the Fair Work Ombudsman, the union and these workers have managed to recover a sum of just under half a million dollars of underpaid wages thus far. The final amount is still to be confirmed. In addition to these workers' pay being deducted for a range of illegal expenses, such as flights to Australia and up-front taxes that have never been passed on to the Australian Taxation Office. These workers have also lived in undignified conditions, including in shipping containers and up to six people per room.

What is worse is: not only have the CFMEU done the government's work to expose the exploitation of these vulnerable workers working here in Australia, but the CFMEU organisers have now been asked by the Fair Work building commission to show cause: how did they find out this information? The two organisers who uncovered these breaches have now been served with a notice to produce by the Fair Work building commission inspectors regarding their right of entry. This is an absolute disgrace. It is an example of this government shooting the messenger.

The CFMEU have represented their members. They have stood up and said: 'There has been a breach here.' The Fair Work Ombudsman is investigating. Yet, because of their hard work, this government is now saying: 'Show cause—how did you find out this information?'

Is this just another example of this government's blind hatred of unions, or is it something else? What should be noted is that the company involved, which employed these workers at two out of the three sites, is a major supporter of the Liberal Party, donating \$400,000 to the Liberal Party, as shown in their most recent AEC disclosures—almost identical to the amount of money that has been recovered by the Fair Work Ombudsman.

This is an absolute disgrace. There is a problem with our visa subclass system in this country. If you come here as a guest worker you should be respected and paid the same rates of pay as Australian workers.

This government needs to act urgently. It needs to stop listening to its party donors and start listening to the people who are doing the work. It needs to make sure that it respects the role of unions and does not prosecute them in this way. I stand with the CFMEU in their call to respect temporary work visas, and I support them in their claim.