



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

**WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT
(IMPROVED REMEDIES FOR
UNPROTECTED ACTION) BILL 2002**

In Committee

SPEECH

Tuesday, 2 March 2004

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 2 March 2004
Page 20524
Questioner
Speaker Abetz, Sen Eric

Source Senate
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Special Minister of State) (1.34 pm)—On behalf of the government, I express our disappointment that the opposition parties are not prepared to support this simple and quite modest bill in its current form. However, we are glad that the Australian Democrats see the benefits of interim orders which will help the commission deal with section 127 applications without the distraction of ongoing industrial action. The government's approach is that the Democrat amendment will substantially negate a number of important elements in the bill but, unlike some other parties in this place, we do not live in a fantasy world. We accept the practicalities and realities of the numbers in the Senate and we are of the view that any improvement to the workplace infrastructure of this nation is beneficial.

I would classify this as an incremental step towards a position that we as a government would like to get to one day but, given the Democrat amendment, we as a government will at least get something. I suppose we have to be thankful for that, given the numbers in the Senate, so I will not bleat too loudly, Senator Murray. At least it will provide some assistance so that we can keep the wonderful environment in which we currently live. I simply add that the decrease in the unemployment rate, the increase in real wages, the sound inflation basis and the low level of industrial disputation that we have enjoyed over the past eight years have not happened by accident. They have happened by the sheer hard work and determination of this government to put in place the policy parameters on which the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Greens have opposed us each and every step of the way.

I take my hat off to the Democrats, although somewhat begrudgingly, because they do not always agree with us, but at least they are in the real world of politics and on occasions are willing to discuss these things with the government to see where the common ground is, as opposed to simply having opposition for opposition's sake. That is something we were promised would cease with the new Leader of the Opposition, but unfortunately it has not happened, especially when it comes to the area of workplace relations. But I am aware of the numbers and we will therefore reluctantly accept the Democrat amendment.

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Bill reported with amendment; report adopted.