



**Members Statements
14 February 2006
Workplace Relations**

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.25 p.m.)—I rise today to once again draw the attention of the House to the Boeing dispute where 27 highly skilled aircraft maintenance workers remain locked out simply because they are seeking a collective agreement. It is now 259 days since they received their last pay cheque. As highly skilled workers who maintain our Air Force jets, they want to go back to work but they want the right to negotiate a collective agreement, which Boeing, their employer, stubbornly refuses. Christmas has come and gone for these workers and still not one member of the federal government has lifted a finger to help them. The local Liberal Party member, the member for Paterson, representing a lot of those workers and representing Williamtown RAAF base where the Boeing site is located, certainly has done nothing. In November, he said, 'It is very disappointing to see Labor and the unions using striking workers as political pawns.'

I do not think the member for Paterson has a very good grasp of the issues if he believes that this group of workers has somehow been duped into this industrial action. They are very sincere. What an insult to these men and women who have just spent Christmas on a picket line and have been put in a position of tremendous financial hardship. Their families are doing it tough. That the only action their local member of parliament can take is to ridicule them is certainly disgraceful.

With the Work Choices \$55 million propaganda campaign, "guaranteed by law" to "preserve the rights of workers to have a union negotiate a collective agreement", it is apparent that the government's real purpose is to drive down wages and conditions and strip away the rights of workers built up over 100 years. That is indeed why the government made sure that employers like Boeing can refuse a collective agreement. 'Let them rot on the picket line,' seems to be the attitude of the member for Paterson and the government. Sadly, that attitude was also very apparent in Tasmania where I visited this month with Labor's industrial relations task force. In Launceston, we had the great privilege of meeting with Laurie Lewis, a meatworker who, with his workmates, has been in dispute with their employer, Blue Ribbon, now the Australian

Food Group, for almost three years. After working for this company for 10 years, the company made management changes and asked the workers to cooperate and go on traineeships, even if you had worked there for 10 years. The workers agreed, to help the company, but on the last day of their traineeship, many of them had their employment terminated. This was a brutal selection process exercised by the bosses.

Later that firm went into liquidation and then offered individual contracts, which the workers refused to sign. Those workers have won two cases in the Tasmanian Supreme Court and one in the Tasmanian Industrial Relations Commission, but they have remained locked out since April 2003. I applaud their commitment. Instead of there being a law against such unscrupulous corporate behaviour, this government—the Howard government—has made it lawful. Shame!

I thank all the participants in the Tasmanian presentations to Labor's task force on industrial relations. Clearly Tasmanians are very vulnerable because of their labour market being so thin. They have our complete support. Unlike the Howard government, Labor will continue to listen and to champion the needs of Australian workers and their families.