

Editorial

This issue of the journal contains an address by the then New South Wales Minister for Industrial Relations Jeff Shaw given at the launching of the new offices of the Industrial Relations Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. Shortly after giving this address Jeff Shaw resigned his post to return to legal practice. It is certainly not the practice of this journal to make comment on political appointments or departures but in this case it is worth making an exception.

Jeff Shaw was widely regarded as not simply a good Minister but the best Minister for Industrial Relations (state or federal) in Australia for a generation. Unlike many of his counterparts, Jeff Shaw was a Minister for Industrial Relations who had a strong working knowledge of the subject. He also demonstrated a deep commitment to achieving a practical but equitable industrial relations system that safeguarded vulnerable groups of workers such as women and migrants. He recognised that the outcomes of an industrial relations system need to be measured in terms of fairness as well as economic efficiency. Unlike some of his contemporaries, he took the 'traditional' view that minimum labour standards were meant to be vigorously enforced. His initiatives included a significant Inquiry into pay equity for women (resulting in new wage fixing principles) and a strategy to address the exploitation of (mainly female and migrant) outworkers in the clothing trade. As a Minister, Jeff Shaw demonstrated an awareness that work arrangements were undergoing rapid change, such as the growth of contract and casual labour, and there was a need for industrial relations laws and institutions to adapt to problems arising from this shift.

He was always receptive to ideas and the input of academic research into shaping policy debate. His strong belief, expressed in his address, is that evidence rather than doctrinaire theories should drive policy. Some of the policy initiatives under his Ministry, such as that in relation to pay equity and outworkers, are deservedly acquiring recognition well beyond the borders of New South Wales. The problems posed by more widespread subcontracting, home-based work and the like can be found in most if not all industrialised countries and thus the search for policy solutions must look at all the available options. One of Jeff's legacies will be that under his stewardship New South Wales developed a number of options worthy of broader attention.

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