



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

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WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (11.21 p.m.): I decided to speak on this Bill only late this afternoon after listening to several Government and Opposition members speak.

Mr Purcell interjected.

Mr LAMING: This is true. Would I tell a lie? The comments I heard led me to revisit the Bill and to read again the Minister's second-reading speech. I note that the Minister talks about his Government's pre-election commitments. My first thought was, "I wonder whom those commitments were to?" To whom were these commitments made? Maybe to the unions, but certainly not to the struggling small businesses and certainly not to the thousands of unemployed in whom the unions do not seem to take much interest!

Mr Fouras: You take five minutes and I'll send you a bouquet—five minutes.

Mr LAMING: I listened to the member for Ashgrove. I will have a question for him and his colleague sitting over there a little later. I ask him to please not leave the Chamber because I would not like him to miss this.

The thousands of unemployed will not be helped out one jot by this legislation. The Minister talks about a comprehensive review of industrial legislation. Does this mean that this amendment is just the first instalment of what is to come? Is there more? Are the unfair dismissal provisions, which were made more reasonable under our Government, the next on the Minister's hit list? I think all members of this House deserve to know what is next on this Government's anti-job agenda. Is it going to roll back our amendments on unfair dismissal provisions? Is any Government member brave enough to indicate tonight that that is next? I see the member for Ashgrove has——

Mr Mackenroth: Next on the agenda is winning a few of your seats and putting you out.

Mr LAMING: We get a response, but it is not to the question. I do not hear anything from the members for Bulimba, Inala or Cleveland. They are sitting there, but they do not want to respond to whether unfair dismissal laws are next. It is very important to people who are going to be voting on this legislation tonight to know whether they are just voting on this amendment or whether this is just the first instalment of a whole raft of anti-job Bills coming through this House.

Mr Purcell: Monotonous repetition.

Mr LAMING: We have to keep asking the questions if members opposite will not answer them, and we are getting the same monotonous, repetitious answers—they are not going to indicate.

I could not believe it when I read further into the speech where the Minister talks about the establishment of a modern, progressive system of industrial relations. I can respond only by saying that his speech writer must be the Rip Van Winkle of industrial relations and has just emerged from a 40-year snooze. The Minister goes on to talk about job security—maybe, but for fewer and fewer workers—and jobs growth. It is just rubbish that this legislation is going to create job growth. The Minister then went on to talk about social and economic objectives for employers and employees. It all sounds terribly good. It is great sounding stuff, but there is only one way to provide decent social objectives, and that is to provide jobs—not anti-jobs legislation.

I would like to come back to this expert representative independent task force that is being set up to review the State's industrial laws. That is the Minister's term; it is certainly not my description. I do not know who is on the task force. It really stumped me when I read that. Has the task force already

met and considered whether this amendment should be put through this House? I do not know whether it has met or whether it has considered this and the whole raft of legislation that might need to be changed. Anyway, we are going to have this expert representative independent task force—what a mouthful—yet we are debating this legislation here tonight.

That really did stump me. Had the task force already recommended the abolition of QWAs before it met or is it going to be given the benefit of the Government's wisdom when it says, "We have you here to tell us what we should be doing about industrial relations, but we have already decided what we are going to do and here is the list. We actually did that one last week and these are the ones that you have to recommend to do in the next session of Parliament." Is the Government going to list them all out so that the expert representative independent task force can be really objective in what it recommends to the Government and ensure that it stays on track with the Government's agenda? I really wonder why the Government takes all this drastic action before the task force reports. Conversely, why bother having a task force if the Government is going to act before that task force reports?

I return to the unfair dismissal laws. What will this Government do if this task force is as good as it sounds and it comes out and suggests that the Government make no changes to the unfair dismissal laws or perhaps even change them so that they are easier for employers to use? I speak with a lot of employers and this is one area about which they are very concerned. They are very concerned and reluctant to put people on. They are concerned that they might not be able to dismiss a person if that person turns out to be not suitable for the job. I know that people on the other side of the Chamber think that that helps employment because the person is not put off, but that is not how it works. At the end of the day employers will put people on if they need them. They will not put them on if they do not need them and they will not put them on if they fear that they will get the wrong person and it will be difficult to dismiss them.

If this expert task force comes out and says, "We recommend that you do not make any changes to those changes", or, "We recommend that you revert back to the position before the coalition changed it", I really wonder whether this Government will listen to that task force. That will be very interesting.

Mr Roberts: Are they still concerned about the current unfair dismissal laws?

Mr LAMING: I take the interjection from the member for Nudgee who asks if they are still concerned. They feel that the amendments we made are an improvement but there is still some concern with them as they are. That is something that needs to be debated. I am sure it will be debated, because I would be most surprised if the Minister and the Government do not come back and try to put the unfair dismissal laws right back where they were when the Government was last in office. I have not seen anyone opposite indicate that that is not going to happen. I think an indication on that matter would be very instructive to the two or three people who may not yet have made up their minds. They might change their vote if they knew that tonight's legislation is just a precursor or a harbinger of the doom that might be coming along. We wonder what the task force is going to do about that matter. We wonder what the Government would do if the task force reported that the unfair dismissal laws should be left as the coalition Government amended them during the last Parliament.

The Minister goes on to list the four key elements of the Bill. The first element claims that provisions for wages and conditions of employment were to be protected. The Government might protect wages with awards and it might protect conditions with awards but it will never protect jobs with awards. Unfortunately, over recent years the union approach has had a fundamental flaw. The unions have tried to protect the interests of a shrinking constituency. This has had a reverse effect when it comes to the provision of jobs.

The Labor Government might think that it speaks for workers but it certainly does not speak for those people who find themselves unemployed because legislation like this does not do anything for the unemployed. When, and not if, the Government does not achieve the 5% unemployment target—and let me say that I applaud any effort and any commitment towards reducing unemployment—

Mr Foley: Good on you, comrade.

Mr LAMING: It is nice to be invited into the brotherhood. I believe that the Attorney-General, as a former Minister for Employment, is a person who genuinely feels for the unemployed. I think he recognises that I have a similar point of view.

I was referring to the Premier's commitment to 5% unemployment. I am not sure where the time line is on that commitment. I am not sure whether it was one year originally. I know it was three years and now I think it is five years. That is a pity. Regardless of which side of this House we find ourselves sitting on, I believe we should all be aiming to get unemployed people back into jobs. It is passing strange that this legislation is not only not going to assist to achieve that result in 12 months, three years or five years, but it is really going to be a negative.

If this Parliament allows the Government to proceed down this track tonight we will have a situation in which the Government is not only not contributing to reaching its own target but is also making it more difficult for itself. I wonder who came up with this legislation. I wonder whether it was workers, union personnel, political minders or was it the creation of the Minister himself. We are talking about jobs. If we are talking about jobs, we are also talking about unemployed people. I bet not one unemployed person had any input into this.

Mr Beanland: It was the union bosses.

Mr LAMING: The member for Indooroopilly suggests that it was the union bosses. He might not be too far wrong. I bet there was not one unemployed person consulted because such a person would say, "What nonsense. This is not going to get me and other unemployed people a job." As a matter of fact, it would make it worse for them.

There are many initiatives that the Government might consider. A lot of things are being considered that would contribute towards rolling back the huge problem that we all identify as unemployment. This amendment does not contribute towards that outcome and I believe it is counterproductive. The House should reject the amendment.
