



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 27 August 1998

WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.44 p.m.): I have been listening to Labor members opposite and their repetitive, tedious misrepresentation. They seek to destroy the reputation of a good Workplace Relations Act that was introduced and successfully steered through—

Mr Sullivan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! If members are going to interject, they will do so from their correct seat.

Miss SIMPSON: That Act was introduced and successfully steered through this Parliament in early 1998 by the member for Clayfield and the then Minister for Training and Industrial Relations. I thought that the member for Clayfield clearly illustrated the absolute rubbish that was spoken by the Honourable the Minister in the second-reading speech that he delivered when he introduced into this place the Workplace Relations Amendment Bill 1998. I am absolutely tired of hearing Labor members opposite mouthing in a senseless way complete mistruths about the benefits of the legislation that the coalition had introduced. They are intent on perpetrating that misinformation and what are downright untruths to confuse the public and to take away the rights that the people have been given. They have been given a choice that they did not have previously.

For example, how many times do we on this side of the Chamber have to repeat that Queensland workplace agreements are not secret documents? They are confidential documents underpinned by protections for employees, protections which are fair dinkum and which can be activated by employees or other parties including the Employment Advocate and the Enterprise Commissioner should an injustice be inflicted by an employer on an employee. Why honourable members opposite fail to distinguish between the word "secret" and the word "confidential" is beyond me. Either they have not read the Act, have a poor understanding of the Queen's English or simply are collaborators with the Minister's attempts to distort the truth about the justice and fairness within the Workplace Relations Act.

I have also heard them quote in a tedious and repetitive manner the so-called discoveries of the report on the effect of the introduction of Queensland workplace agreements, which was commissioned by the Minister and altered by the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. The shadow Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and other speakers on this side of the House have continually pointed to the most significant deficiency in the report: its lack of balance given that it fails to outline the benefits that accrue to employees as a result of the making of a QWA with an employer. It is a shameful attempt to distort the debate that is taking place in this Parliament and the broader community. The member for Clayfield suggested that the Minister should do the decent thing and commission a genuinely independent report that can be achieved only by having not an anonymous author from the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations but a highly respected and well recognised individual within the Queensland community, the integrity of whose research and results we can all have confidence in—in other words, an independent review.

I am also tired of listening to members opposite knocking the very considerable achievements of the Queensland coalition Government and blaming the industrial relations system that we put in place for alleged failings in the area of employment. As honourable members on this side of the House have clearly demonstrated, under the coalition Government Queensland boasted record employment

creation and an eight-year record low in the rate of unemployment; yet, despite those undeniable facts and figures, members opposite continue in their attempts to rewrite history and to convince other people—and more particularly themselves—that it was doom and gloom in terms of employment creation under a coalition Government.

Honourable members in this place should realise that every time they seek to rewrite history, every time they ignore the facts that are well and truly on the public record, they are doing so to the disadvantage of the broader Queensland community. Queensland experienced a record rate of growth, record employment growth, a decline in the unemployment rate, a massive and record capital works program and so much more under the coalition Government, including a massive reduction in hospital waiting lists and times, lower class sizes, more police and generally better service delivery right across the range of Government departments.

I implore members opposite to stop knocking and be positive where there is a need to be positive and to be constructively critical where this can indeed be justified. Let us argue in a fair dinkum manner the impact that this amendment Bill will have on the viability of small businesses in Queensland and, more particularly, on their willingness to make positive employment decisions.

As the member for Clayfield, the Leader of the Opposition and other Opposition members who have already spoken to this Bill have stated, this legislation will do nothing but create disincentives within Queensland workplaces for employers to the point at which we predict that their intention to employ people will be greatly compromised. This legislation seeks to eliminate choice from the agreement-making processes within Queensland workplaces. It puts the union right back into the agreement-making processes irrespective of whether employers and employees want the union to be involved in such agreement-making processes. It reintroduces a system of industrial relations that is centralised, collective, cumbersome, bureaucratic and one in which participation by small businesses will be minimal.

This side of the House does not condemn a collective approach to workplace bargaining and agreement making; quite the contrary, we support it and we support the provision for such agreement making to exist within the legislation that the Labor Party Government is attempting to amend. However, at the same time the coalition parties support choice and an essential part of that choice within the coalition's industrial relations legislation is the capacity for individual employers and employees to enter into individual agreements, referred to as Queensland workplace agreements.

That the Beattie Labor Party Government and Minister Braddy are attempting to deprive Queensland workers of their choice is a clear demonstration of their ideologically blinkered bias in favour of an industrial relations system that should have died out with the dinosaurs. They want to take this State and the Queensland economy backwards. For the sake of Queensland small businesses and employment growth in this State, I urge all non-Labor members within this Parliament to reject the amendments that are being put forward by the Minister and his Government.
