



Speech by

GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (2.43 p.m.): One of the fundamental differences between the conservatives and the Labor Party has always centred on our approaches to people in the work force and the trade union movement in general. I have been in this Parliament for nearly six years. Over those six years the rhetoric from the conservatives has never changed. We are always hearing that it is the workers' fault, that the economy is bad because it is the workers' fault.

Mr Schwarten: Or the unions.

Mr NUTTALL: Yes, or it is because of the unions. It is never because of business practices or management decisions; it is always the workers' fault.

Mr Lucas: Or Heiner.

Mr NUTTALL: Yes, or it is Heiner's fault.

Mr Schwarten: That's why the Tories exist.

Mr NUTTALL: That is right. It is always the workers' fault.

The previous speaker said that we are damaging the economy by changing this legislation. I will tell the House who has damaged the economy of this State more than anyone. It was the political party opposite whose decision on preferences at the last State election is still damaging the economy of this State. Members opposite have a lot to answer for. They should not blame the workers of this State for the bad decisions made by their political party.

QWAs are nothing other than a tool to exploit workers. That is all they have ever been. Over the past couple of days in this Chamber the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations has given numerous examples of the way in which QWAs exploited workers. Today in this debate I challenge the conservative side of politics to show us half a dozen agreements that have resulted in workers being better off than they were under an awards system. Today we read an article in the Courier-Mail about how wonderful QWAs are. How ironic is that? We are in the middle of debating the workplace relations legislation and today we read only one article about one employee who is happy with his QWA.

Mr Santoro: We've given you more than that.

Mr NUTTALL: The member should wait his turn; I am coming to him.

A number of Government speakers in this debate have outlined the salient points about the disadvantages of QWAs in Queensland and how they have been used time and time again to reduce the conditions of employment of workers. We saw from the former Minister an ideologically driven attack on not only workers but also the trade union movement.

Mr Lucas: You have got to be fair on him. He is the only one in the Liberal Party who has even got an ideology. At least he's got one!

Mr NUTTALL: The member for Lytton is right. The former Minister never listens to anyone. He has his own ideas, and that is it.

The only safe system to protect workers is the awards system and the Industrial Relations Commission. That fact is proved by the history of this country. When the Minister introduced the Bill, he

said that its intent was to maintain the awards system as the primary vehicle for determining wages and employment conditions. That is what the awards system is about. The previous speaker spoke about the inflexibility of the awards system. That is simply not the case. He gave examples of people in hotels, shops and the tourism industry working long hours. Those industries have been around for many decades. Employees in those industries have been able to sit down with their employers and negotiate flexibility in those workplaces. There is nothing in the awards system that will not allow the flexibility that employers seek. If QWAs were such great trailblazers breaking new horizons and creating employment, why is it that the major employer groups did not embark on the process of implementing QWAs? It was because they believe, as we do, that it is far easier and better to negotiate with an organised work force. The trade union movement does not exist to give employers a hard time, it exists to protect the rights of workers. If employers are good employers, they have nothing at all to fear from the awards system.

Let us look at the legacy of the former Minister for Industrial Relations. The honourable member for Clayfield has a track record of leaving carnage wherever he goes. We have only to look at his political party and the damage that he has caused within it. We are grateful to the honourable member for Clayfield; we believe he is one of our greatest assets. His behaviour both inside and outside this Parliament does nothing other than benefit the Labor Party. We are deeply appreciative of that.

The man in the Liberal Party who is the number-cruncher cannot get even four votes from his own parliamentary wing to lead his own party. From this former Minister we saw a break in the conventions of industrial relations. We saw one of the greatest ironies and one of the greatest travesties of justice when Commissioner Dempsey's term was due to be renewed. For the first time in the history of this State, a Minister refused to follow convention and refused to renew the term of that Industrial Relations Commissioner.

Mr Lucas: Tore up the convention.

Mr NUTTALL: He tore up the convention despite the fact that that commissioner was held in high regard by both employer and employee groups within this State. Yet this Minister through blind ideology tore up convention and refused to renew the contract of that Industrial Relations Commissioner. I believe that that decision in itself had weakened the industrial relations system within this State.

I have yet to see where the great job creations have come from in relation to QWAs, as the previous speaker mentioned. I have not seen any marked improvement in unemployment figures simply because we have QWAs. If honourable members want to talk about industrial disputations, there is the Minister who was driving the debate and driving the wedge in the MUA dispute. This former Minister was up to his neck in the MUA dispute. That Minister was hell-bent on trying to destroy the wharfies and their union. That is not the role of a Minister who is out there trying to create jobs. That Minister should have been out there lobbying the Minister for Transport to do something about increasing apprenticeships in the Railways and he should have been lobbying the Energy Minister to do something about increasing——

Mr Johnson: Ten per cent.

Mr NUTTALL: But the former Minister never went to him. The honourable member for Gregory says that that was his policy. If that was his policy, why did the Minister not go over to him and say, "Let us do something about increasing apprenticeships; let us double the number of apprenticeships"? That is what we are going to do in railways. The member opposite had the chance for two and a half years. But what did that bloke sitting there right beside him, the honourable member for Clayfield, do? Did he go to the member for Gregory, knock on his door and say, "Listen, I want to do something about increasing apprenticeships"?

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr NUTTALL: In his dreams he did. He should have been doing that with the Energy Minister. He should have been knocking on his doorstep, saying, "We need to do something in this State about apprenticeships." But he knows and I know that that is not what he did.

Mr SANTORO: Under the coalition Government, Queensland——

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! You have no right to stand up and start——

Mr SANTORO: Mr Deputy Speaker, the honourable member——

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member will resume his seat.

Mr NUTTALL: The former Minister presided over one of the worst relationships in this State between the Government and the ACTU.

Mr SANTORO: I rise to a point of order. Under Standing Order 119, I find the comments of the honourable member for Sandgate offensive. I did not preside over the worst history in apprenticeships or industrial disputations. I find those comments offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr NUTTALL: I withdraw. If that comment upsets him, I withdraw.

Mr Santoro interjected.

Mr NUTTALL: No, the honourable member for Clayfield says that I speak an untruth. That is just not correct. History will show—you should have a look at your record and the statistics.

Mr Santoro: Apprenticeships went up.

Mr NUTTALL: No way in the world! Apprenticeships went down. You should get out there and have a look at the real facts.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Sandgate will address the Chair.

Mr NUTTALL: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will. The realities of life are that this former Industrial Relations Minister has a track record of not being concerned about the wellbeing of workers in this State. That is the reality of life.

One of the great things that we need is a balance between employers and employees. That is what the award system in this State offers. It offers a fair and just balance. It offers an impartial umpire in terms of the Industrial Relations Commission. If there are grievances or difficulties, the Industrial Relations Commission is there to assist the parties. The Workplace Relations Amendment Bill before the House today restores that fairness and impartiality, and allows workers to be treated fairly and equitably. It allows employers to be able to get on with the job and create wealth within this State.

It is a fallacy for members opposite to be saying that the trade union movement is anti-development and anti-employer. That simply is not the case. In my experience and the experience of many trade unionists on this side of the Chamber—and people would be well aware of this—most of the industrial disputes are not about money but are about conditions and the way people are treated in their workplace.

I urge honourable members from the new One Nation Party, who are participating in this debate this afternoon, to consider carefully their decision in relation to this Bill. A number of them represent electorates that contain a large number of workers and the decision that those members make today will affect their livelihoods for the future. I urge them to consider carefully their views in relation to that matter.
