



Speech by

**Tony ELLIOTT**

**MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM**

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Hansard 27 August 1998

**WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr ELLIOTT** (Cunningham—NPA) (11.35 p.m.): As someone who comes from rural Queensland, I have pleasure in taking part in the debate on the Workplace Relations Amendment Bill. I believe it is important for us to understand that what is being attempted here tonight will undo a tremendous amount of good that has taken place in country areas.

I will give the House a few examples. Many people in my area live on hobby farms or on the edge of small towns. These people have plant of their own such as a backhoe, a cotton picker or various other bits of equipment that they work during the season. In the off season they go away and work for other people on a contract arrangement. This has worked in with the coalition's legislation in respect of workers compensation because those people can be self-insured. As a result, they are covered by insurance and they are able to follow a much more individualistic style in the work that they carry out.

The Government is trying to undermine much of that individuality which has been built into the workplace. I know lots of people who are tremendously pleased with the system of QWAs because they can make agreements with individuals. For example, let us take someone who owns a cotton picker, a module builder, or various other pieces of equipment that are suited to the cotton industry. The cotton picking season sometimes extends from February until May. Those people may take some time off and do some part-time work during the last part of the winter. The winter crop is harvested in the spring and summer. These people probably own their own vehicle, their own compressor, their own welder and their own tools with which they can repair headers. They drive headers to other people's properties. Sometimes those people will be farmers and sometimes they will be straight out contractors.

These people then work under a contract arrangement. Both parties are very happy with that. In most instances, those people are making far more money per hour than the average worker who simply works for wages. These people see themselves as contractors. They are very happy with that situation. Anything that this Government does to undermine that situation will make it more difficult for those parties to get together and have such a relationship.

Another example I would like to quote concerns the rural shires. A very good example which has been highly successful in my area concerns the Waggamba Shire. The Waggamba Shire Council went to a lot of trouble to negotiate a contract arrangement with its council employees. I get a lot of feedback when I speak to the people who work for the Waggamba Shire and they tell me that they take very little notice of the clock. Sometimes they work a short week and sometimes they might work a longer week; it depends on the job they are doing and what is needed. So if they go out to work on a particular road and they need to spend more time on that particular job, they will extend their hours and work according to what is needed.

If members speak to the Waggamba Shire executive, the mayor and those people who are in charge of the executive side of the council, they will find that that arrangement has been highly successful. As well, those people are doing better than the average council workers who are working for other shires. If the Government is not careful, it will wind back the clock and make it more difficult for the people who wish to enter into these sorts of arrangements.

I am one of the few members on this side of the House who have held an AWU ticket. I was a member of the AWU. My friend on the other side of the Chamber who wears riding boots and wanders around this place was rather surprised to discover that I was an AWU member.

**Mr Purcell:** Did you keep yourself financial?

**Mr ELLIOTT:** Only when the organiser turned up. I have a good understanding of how the whole system works. The member who took Di McCauley's place has worked in that sector. I believe that he made some good points. One does not often see union organisers in areas where it is difficult to drive, and one does not often see them when it is about 110 degrees in the waterbag. They tend to frequent the airconditioned bars in town quite a bit.

In all seriousness, I believe that we all need to consider this situation. When I was in that position, I always wanted to work in a way that suited me. I have never been a great conformist. Many members on this side of the House would say, "Hear, hear", to that and say that it is a pity that I was not a bit more of a conformist. But there are times when people look back on their lives and realise that it is important to have more flexibility in their workplaces. That is what I believe these QWAs are all about. It is very important to be able to be flexible to work when there is work to do. And when there is no work, rather than trying to make work for employees, people should be able to agree that it is probably a good time to go to town or to go to an agricultural show or one of the various other shows that are on from time to time. That is what sensible employer/employee relationships are all about.

I have mentioned Goondiwindi. It is interesting to note what is happening there at the moment. The people of Goondiwindi are facing the possibility of another flood tomorrow. The river is about eight metres at the moment, and it may well reach close to nine metres tomorrow. That will cause tremendous damage to roads in my electorate and in the electorate of Warrego. I have been in touch with various Ministers—the Premier, the Minister for Primary Industries and the Minister for Emergency Services. I take this opportunity to thank them for their willingness to have equipment and personnel on stand-by should the river peak at a higher level than I have been talking about. It is going to create a tremendous amount of damage to roads in that area. Under contract, people from the councils will go out and fix those problems.

Opposition members understand that the problems experienced by people in those areas are different from those experienced by people here in the city. The whole situation is very difficult. We must understand that the land-holders along that river have had a large amount of damage inflicted on them already, and there is potential for an even greater disaster if the rains continue. It could bring ruin to what could be the most incredible winter crop that we have seen in a long time. Those people will need to be able to employ people on a casual basis to fix many of those problems.

All members need to understand just how practical QWAs have been. I would be absolutely amazed and distraught to think that members would be silly enough to change that system and bring about a change that will create very large problems to many people in rural and regional Queensland.

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