



Speech by

Mrs J. SHELDON

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BILL

Mrs SHELDON (Caloundra—LP) (9.59 p.m.): In my contribution to this debate tonight, I wish to focus on the job destruction potential of this Beattie/Braddy Industrial Relations Bill. It is a Bill that militates directly against some of the key objectives that are detailed at the beginning of the industrial relations legislation we are debating today, one of the most interesting ones being—

"providing for an effective and efficient economy, with strong economic growth, high employment, employment security, improved living standards, low inflation and national and international competitiveness;"

This Bill will certainly not help to achieve that objective, and this morning's unemployment figures clearly show that this Government is on the wrong track when it comes to bringing legislation into this Parliament which is as anti-small business as this Bill before us is.

Mr Davidson interjected.

Mrs SHELDON: I am getting to that, and I am sure that the member will be enlightened to know how badly this State is doing in real employment terms under Labor.

The Opposition has now been saying for many months that the employment growth which Premier Beattie and his Ministers boast about is the result of the good economic framework and the good legislative framework which was left behind to this increasingly discredited Labor Government by the previous coalition Government. We have been saying that the employment policies of the Federal Government also are great contributors to the economic growth that is occurring not just generally throughout Australia but specifically here in Queensland. As the member for Noosa mentioned, I think it is very important that the people of this State know in detail what the real unemployment rate really is.

Mr Malone: It has gone up.

Mrs SHELDON: Unfortunately, in May the unemployment rate was 8.3%. If the member compares that with the figure one month ago, he will find that it was 7.8%. So it certainly has increased by 0.5%. This is under the Beattie can-do—according to him—Government.

Mr Healy: So how many more people are unemployed?

Mrs SHELDON: That is a very good question. The number of unemployed is 148,600. That compares with last month's figure of 139,900.

Mr Healy: What an outrage!

Mrs SHELDON: It is an outrage. There is a considerable difference. If honourable members make a proper comparison, they will find that the number of employed was 1.644 million compared with 1.649 million. They will see that there is also a considerable drop in the number of people employed. I think this is quite a travesty. There is a drop in full-time employment.

Mr Malone: Labor is jobs, jobs, jobs.

Mrs SHELDON: It is supposedly jobs, jobs, jobs, and full-time jobs, I do believe the Leader of the Labor Party has said, and as Mr Ludwig has said, representing the political arm of the union movement. When one looks at those figures, one sees that the full-time figures are now 1.195 million compared to 1.213 million one month ago—again, a considerable drop.

Mr Healy: And again that is only with about a third of the capital works budget spent.

Mrs SHELDON: That is very true. That is with only one third of the capital works budget spent. As we know, the Government dragged the chain on spending the capital works budget so that it would have more money to try to prop up its ailing budgetary position. What happens is that this catches up. Now we can see that capital works in this State are falling behind, and very badly so.

Of course, because there was this drop in full-time employment, we have now got an increase in part-time employment—the very thing that Premier "can-do Beattie" said would not occur. He said, "I will deliver full-time jobs. There will be none of this part-time employment." Yet here we are with the very latest figures, and they show that the part-time unemployed now number 449,100 compared with 436,100. That is a considerable increase in part-time employment, and at the same time, of course, we have a drop in full-time employment. So there has been a failure by this Government in respect of every criteria: a failure on the unemployment rate, a failure on the increased number of unemployed, a failure on the number of totally employed and a failure on the number of full-time employed. The only increase we find is an increase in the number of part-time employed. I can see, Mr Speaker, how concerned you are about this.

Bills such as the one we are debating today and the recently passed Labor Party's WorkCover Act will do nothing but destroy the incentive that currently exists within the Queensland economy for small businesses to employ people. In fact, what legislation such as this will do is destroy the viability of small businesses, and many people in existing jobs will be thrown onto the unemployment scrap heap. I do not make these statements with any glee or happiness, for we all want every Queenslander possible to have a job. That has to be the aim of every Queenslander. It certainly is the aim of any parent; it certainly is the aim of anyone who wishes to see this State progress. When I say "we", I mean the people on this side of the House, because it is very obvious with what is currently happening in this union-inspired Bill that the Labor Party is not really interested in jobs—just in the unions.

On Wednesday morning I heard the Treasurer do a big bucket job on the QCCI survey on the intentions of small businesspeople to employ new people or to keep on their existing work force in the light of the provisions within the Bill that we are debating here today. The Treasurer did everything that he could to discredit the survey. However, in view of this morning's unemployment figures, which, as I have just mentioned, saw the unemployment rate in Queensland increase by 0.5%, it is clear that it is the Treasurer, the Premier and their Government who have egg all over their faces when it comes to real achievement in the area of employment generation.

I wish to look at the QCCI survey results in some detail, but before doing so let me make a few general comments. The QCCI business survey indicates that 37% of all employers could shed staff as a result of the new State industrial relations legislation. That is the gift that this legislation gives to the union movement.

Mr Malone: Was that a comprehensive survey?

Mrs SHELDON: A very comprehensive survey and a very well credited survey.

That is the real present that they will get: no jobs, no new opportunities. Next time honourable members hear the union movement moaning over a lack of job security, they can certainly thank this Government. Next time they hear the union movement complaining about increased casualisation, they can thank Minister Braddy, who is the architect of this. This is not legislation that cares about employers; this is not legislation that will give confidence to employers; this is not legislation that will give any confidence whatsoever to the business community.

The Government and its trade union cronies are quick to criticise business for employing casual staff, for outsourcing labour and for outsourcing jobs, and for using labour hire companies. But why would they not take every opportunity to rid themselves of the prescriptive legislative pall that is about to fall over them? The Minister, the Government and the unions have decided to make the legislation so hard for employers in such a variety of ways that employers will have no confidence in hiring and no confidence in putting on extra workers.

In case members are in any doubt about why the Government is caving in to the union movement, I will tell the House about the donations to the Queensland Branch of the Australian Labor Party from trade unions. I will just cover the last four years. In the year 1994–95, \$1,019,901 was donated; in 1995–96, it was \$1,074,196; in 1996–97 it dropped—and here is where the concern really started to rise. Money paid to the Labor Party by the unions started to drop. In 1996–97, it was only \$969,201. But what do we see in 1997–98 with a Labor Government back in power, and, as we know and as I said before, Bill Ludwig's comment that it is the political arm of the trade unions? We find that it received \$1,907,815. Members can see that there is a certain element of bribery in this matter. This Bill is not looking after jobs in this State. It is not looking after employers. It is not looking after the State of Queensland. It is looking after donations to the Labor Party.

Mr Malone: Quite a large percentage of that would be AWU funding, I would imagine.

Mrs SHELDON: I would say that quite a percentage is AWU funding. It is no wonder, as the member for Chermside knows, that Bill Ludwig is concerned. Here he is doing his level best to fund the Labor Party and what is the Premier doing? He is turning his back on the strongest labour union in the State, the AWU. The member for Chermside, as an AWU member, should be standing up for Bill Ludwig, not sitting in here as an apologist for Peter Beattie.

On that point, I think we need to look at what the AWU has done for the Labor Party. In 1994-95, the five largest union donors were: the Australian Workers Union, \$218,540; the ALHMU, miscellaneous division, \$108,532; the Shop Distributive/Allied Employees Association, \$108,142; the AFMEU/PKIU, \$74,779; and the Queensland Nurses Union, \$47,000.

For 1995-96, the contribution of the AWU was \$287,230; the LHMWU was \$142,720; the CFMEU was \$135,046; the SDAEA was \$119,742 and the CEPU was \$82,431. Members can see what is happening: people are getting disillusioned with the union movement. Now we will look at 1996-97. The contribution of the AWU was \$245,953; the ALHMWU was \$139,535; the SDAEA Queensland was \$112,722; the CFMEU was \$109,366; and the AMWU was \$76,000. In 1997-98, because membership in the Australian Workers Union had dropped, its contribution was \$221,002. Honourable members can see——

Mr Healy interjected.

Mrs SHELDON: Exactly. The member for Toowoomba North is spot on. Obviously the real concern for the AWU is the drop in membership and it wants to use its political arm and its political muscle on this Beattie Labor Government. So we have a Labor Government again not looking after the people of this State, not looking after the employers, not looking after a good economy, but looking after its union mates, as we know it always does.

The new IR laws are not about fairness. They are not about a better workplace for both employers and employees. They are about a return to the old days, as I have just shown the House, of union rights——

Mr Horan: It is Mr Beattie's testimonial.

Mrs SHELDON: It is Mr Beattie's testimonial—and Mr Braddy's testimonial. This legislation is about union rights, union intervention, union entry and union membership, as I have just demonstrated to the House.

The new Bill is a return to oppressive, prescriptive rights for the workers and not rights for employers or business. The new Bill forces employers to allow unions in workplaces where they have no members. It allows unions to intervene and interfere with non-union certified agreements. It forces the registry to post a notice about all new certified agreements for seven days. It forces the commission to notify all relevant unions that there is a CA they might like to look at. It will not allow gains made in the CA to be rolled into the award system. It will not allow investors to choose which unions they want to do business with. It makes it harder to buy and sell a business because of the new rules about transmission. It allows lawyers into what has been traditionally a lay jurisdiction. It allows union encouragement clauses—one step away from the bad old days of no ticket, no start. It removes all the safeguards that the Marshall Cooke inquiry found should be in the Act to stop union rorts at election time.

The survey showed that there was an unexpected percentage increase in employment levels for the next 12 months. There was an expectation of, overall, a 2.71% increase in employment levels. This was going to be as a result of an overall increase in all three levels of employment—full-time, part-time and casual. More importantly, the survey showed that 12 industry sectors— agriculture, mining, manufacturing, business, community services, finance, insurance, health services, education, retail, transport, tourism attractions and restaurant catering—all expected overall improvements in employment.

But now the situation has deteriorated. Now the situation is not so bright. Due to the Industrial Relations Bill now before us, a massive 37% of respondents indicated that they would shed existing employees. The results were further broken down to examine the findings by size of firm. The table shows that 38% of firms employing up to 20 employees would shed labour, while 43% of those firms employing between 21 and 50 employees would remove labour. With Queensland being the small business State of Australia, and with over 97% of firms fitting into the ABS official definition of small business, this is a most damning outcome.

Respondents were asked to indicate how many employees would be lost as a result of the changes to the legislation. The survey showed that 13,994 employees were employed by respondent companies, with an indication that 669 staff would be shed as a result of the Bill. This figure is 4.78% of the total employment pool.

Mr Braddy: Are you reading someone else's speech again?

Mrs SHELDON: What I am reading is Mr Braddy's sad dereliction of his duty to the people of this State. The majority of those to lose their jobs would be full-time employees, representing 55% of the employment pool. Thirteen per cent would be part-time employees and 32% would be casual employees.

But worse is to come. I have concentrated tonight, as members will see, on jobs—on the loss of jobs under this Beattie Labor Government. This shows the hypocrisy of the Premier, who is talking about creating jobs, jobs, jobs. Yet the independent figures I have cited tonight show that jobs are being lost; they are not being created. These are not the words of the Opposition; these are the words of independent surveys and, indeed, the official unemployment rates and loss of job rates themselves.

As well as the QCCI survey finding an expectation that existing jobs will be lost as a result of changes to the industrial relations legislation, additional employers have registered that the Bill will impact on employment opportunities. That is, the employment of new employees would be affected by the announced changes. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents indicated that future employment opportunities would be detrimentally impacted upon by the change. Those businesses and employers that would think hardest about employing new employees are predominantly in the small and medium-sized categories. For those employers employing up to 20 employees, 72% indicated that employment opportunities would be negatively impacted upon. For employers employing up to 50 staff, 72% indicated an expected negative input.

That is the result of this legislation. That is the legacy that this legislation will leave to Queensland workers. Jobs will be lost and opportunities will be and are being lost, as we saw from today's unemployment figures. Employers will have no choice but to rethink the way they hire staff when they are faced with the intrusive, unwanted and prescriptive union involvement that this Bill brings.

One of the key objects of the new industrial relations legislation may very well be high employment and employment security, but under these laws they will never be achieved. Contrast that with the coalition's record of employment creation when we were in Government for our two and a half years. My parliamentary colleague and shadow Minister, the member for Clayfield, has already detailed this achievement, but I would like to reiterate some of the very salient points our policies made.

When we took over Government as a coalition, Labor had given Queensland its highest unemployment rate since the Great Depression, that is, 11.1%, and we are obviously crawling back up there. During Labor's last term in office, 58,000 Queenslanders lost their jobs and the unemployment rate soared by 60%. On the other hand, during the coalition's term of Government, 97,700 jobs were created. The coalition gave Queensland its lowest unemployment rate—8.3% in March 1998. Employment growth in Queensland for the year to May 1998 was 4.3%, against a growth of 2.1% nationally. In the last 12 months of the coalition Government, 30,200 full-time jobs and 36,000 part-time jobs were created in Queensland. That is the record of the coalition Government. Nothing contained in this Bill will assist the Labor Party to emulate that record.

Time expired.
