



Speech by

Mr M. VEIVERS

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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WORKCOVER QUEENSLAND AMENDMENT BILL

Mr VEIVERS (Southport—NPA) (12.11 p.m.), continuing: Yesterday when I was speaking on this Bill, I was asking: where is the equity in this flawed policy direction? Once again, the approach seems to be: hit the employers first and in this case not fix a problem, but create one. I say "create one" because this Government does not know what behavioural changes it will unleash with its reforms or what cost impacts might result from its dismal failure to understand the vital difference between prudential policy and sectional advantage.

In its 10 months, this can't do Beattie Government has proved conclusively that it is not prepared to consult fairly or responsibly, that it fails the real test of leadership on matters of substance, that it has learned nothing from the failure of the last Labor Government—the Goss Labor Government—that came in with hype and blew out with hubris. This can't do Labor Government and this Minister are simply not prepared to explain their position on premium rate setting or what they expect the future to be for employer premiums.

Recent so-called actuarial briefings were an absolute farce. By all accounts from those attending, the actuary was not allowed to respond to legitimate questions. This sort of clone-room policy development, this sort of fait accompli policy delivery, is a disgrace. This Government constantly tells us it is a consultative Government; it is a listening Government. I tell you what, it consults itself and listens—we must presume intently—to the sound of silence that inevitably results from creating a vacuum. But it should not fool itself that this silence is golden or that it will last. As its late and unlamented predecessor, the Goss Labor Government, discovered to its cost, today's Queenslanders demand more than slick public relations and they will not wear the sort of hectoring homilies that we get from the Premier and his Cabinet colleagues whenever something fails to go the way they want.

When this WorkCover debate is over—we hope over in a way that entrenches genuine equity and mandates commonsense, but we are not going to hold our breath for either of those outcomes from those opposite—this Government will be attempting to court employers, asking them to create extra employment or join in some other scheme for which it wants support. But the Premier and his Cabinet have Buckley's chance of obtaining their cooperation if they have foisted on them the costly and incentive destroying initiatives contained in this apology for a Bill.

Queensland needs to go forward. The Government needs to recognise the growing role of private business in this State and to bolster the capacity of business, particularly small business, to build the private sector. The Labor Party in particular needs to come to terms with several facts of political life as Queensland—and hopefully the ALP—enters the 21st century. These facts are plain. They are not uncomfortable except apparently to Labor politicians, who owe their political status to the Jurassic Park of old-style unionism.

The principles are that public policy must be prudential, that it must be able to stand up to genuine actuarial examination, that it must aim to eliminate rorts instead of promoting them, that it must take proper account of the fact that rights are always to be balanced against obligations on both sides and that the workplace today—and yes, the compensation arena—is a vastly different place to the historical model on which the Labor Party apparently prefers to base its policy positions.

The people are no longer taken in by smoke and mirror tricks and neither are employers. They can spot a fancy lure a mile away. So can employees. In the case of the WorkCover Amendment Bill,

the Government's announcement that the premium surcharge is to go is just that sort of deal. It is a cynical attempt to appease employers to fool them into thinking that this Government cares about them, and the union heavies who run this Government do not give two hoots about employers. Sadly, it seems they do not give even two hoots about employees, because it is employees who will ultimately pay the price when the Workers Compensation Fund dives back into danger.

Short-sighted policy is always bad policy, and a short-sighted Government is always a bad Government. In something as fundamental to workers' genuine rights as adequate State compensation funding, short-sighted and politically driven decision making is an anathema. These proposed amendments to the WorkCover scheme are not founded on serious analysis or even on full disclosure to the people who will have to put up the money. They should be definitely voted down in this House.

As I said yesterday, in the months leading up to the coalition's forming Government in 1996 little information was supplied to explain what were the issues facing the workers compensation scheme—I tend to repeat myself here. Where premiums and costs were concerned, the coalition was suspicious that the Goss Government was hiding the truth. Given the scarcity of information available from the Government, we believed that this suspicion was justified. As the facts turned out, we were right; Labor's little nest of control clones had been hiding the facts. I feel that maybe they are hiding those facts again from us today. As I said, this Bill should be voted down in the House.
