



Speech by

Mr SANTO SANTORO

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS POLICY

Mr SANTORO (Clayfield—LP) (12.26 a.m.): The Queensland coalition totally rejects the State Government's claims that Australian workers have suffered as a direct result of the Federal Government's and the previous State coalition Government's workplace relations laws. Both the Beattie Government and the Federal Opposition failed to provide the recent Senate inquiry with even one example of the abuse of workers resulting from coalition workplace relations laws. I reiterate—not one example was able to be provided by the Beattie Labor Government or the Federal Labor Opposition.

Mr Braddy, Mr Beazley and Ms Kernot are long on rhetoric and very short on evidence of the alleged abuse of workers and employees by coalition workplace relations laws. Since those laws came into being when I was Minister, not one issue of abuse was raised in this Parliament, in the media, with unions or in other forums, yet those opposite still continue with the rhetoric that those laws were abusive.

The recent ministerial statement by Minister Braddy is a sign that the ALP thinks that workplace relations is a political game. State Labor obviously has such little confidence in the Federal ALP, Mr Beazley or Ms Kernot to deal with Federal legislation that they are having to use the Queensland Parliament to speak on Federal legislation. The Queensland Government should be concentrating on more important things relevant to Queensland than the machinations of the Senate in Canberra and ALP/Australian Democrat posturing on Senate committees—things such as the ever-increasing Queensland unemployment rate and why it is moving in the opposite direction from the national unemployment rate. That is the real issue which the Beattie Labor Government refuses to deal with.

It is a disgrace that the Beattie Labor Government would support in the Queensland Parliament the blockage in the Federal Senate of industrial reforms which have helped the country reduce its unemployment rate and provide higher real wages on the back of higher productivity. It is as shameful as the Queensland Government re-regulating the industrial relations system in this State, as it has done in its first 12 months in Government. The Queensland Government keeps on doing just that.

If ever there was a need for further sensible industrial relations changes to come from Federal Parliament, it is now—at a time when State Labor Governments are re-regulating the system and rebuilding union power. For example, at a time when the Queensland Labor Government has taken away the right of small business to be exempted from unfair dismissal laws for 12 months when employing new employees, it is essential that Federal unfair dismissal laws provide a better and fairer deal to small business.

For example, at a time when awards are being re-regulated in Queensland with union preference and mandatory union control of independent contractors, it is essential that the Federal system can provide an escape mechanism for employees who are interested in productivity, jobs and agreement making rather than union control. There can be no joy for Queensland from the actions of the Federal Senate and its industrial relations committee.

Unlike the Queensland Labor Party, the Federal coalition Government's "more jobs, better pay" Bill was the product of an open and transparent policy put directly to the people before the Howard coalition Government was re-elected in 1998. There was a mandate for it. In contrast, Queensland Labor hid from the people of Queensland their real motives, set up a flawed and self-serving inquiry after their election, and

since then have proceeded to play the tune of their union mates. It is noteworthy that Democrat Senator Murray, in his Senate committee report in the "more jobs, better pay" Bill tabled in the Senate on Monday, stated that the 1996 Act and, by implication, the Queensland coalition 1997 Act, had been successful. That is a reference to the very reforms that the Queensland Labor Government has torn down. Will Minister Braddy join with the Federal Democrats and laud the success of the 1996 Act and its template reform in Queensland? Of course not! I suspect that he is only interested in playing a game, not the real issues.

The Bill, which has now failed to pass through the Senate, would have provided a continued safety net award regulation of wages and conditions of employment for the low paid and disadvantaged workers; continued access to uncapped negotiated pay increases and improvements in conditions of employment and productivity for workers making collective or individual workplace agreements; continued rights to non-discrimination, to freedom of association and to equal pay for work of equal value; continued access to compulsory conciliation and compulsory arbitration on award-regulated issues; a continued independent, resourced and effective commission; continued rights for workers to collectively associate or bargain, as well as rights to individually bargain without coercion; and continued operation of an employee no-disadvantage test.

They are the sorts of conditions that were contained within that Bill—conditions that are certainly not recognised by members opposite and conditions that would have led to the creation of more jobs right throughout Australia and, indeed Queensland, but conditions that will now not prevail and not assist the ALP achieve its 5% unemployment target. In the end, the big losers are Queensland workers.

Time expired.
