



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BILL

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (11 a.m.): Last night as the coalition stood in here and defended the working man in this State, that den of inequity, the Stranger's Bar, rang with the echoes of singing as the AWU invaded that coven of socialism in this House. They sang and drank as a Bill oozed through the House, a Bill that will return this State to the glory days of trade unionism and totally devastate any chance that we have of moving into the year 2000 with any confidence or ability to work towards large projects that will bring real jobs to this State—not part-time jobs of two or three hours a week, but real jobs.

Although I have spoken about this before, it may surprise some honourable members to know that I was a member of the Transport Workers Union. I was not forced to join the union. I joined out of choice because my employer was pretty shonky. As a security guard, I wanted to know that if I was ever injured in that line of work, especially as that is such a high-risk occupation, I had some sort of guarantee that I would be looked after in the future and that I would be recompensed in some way. I emphasise the point that when I joined the Transport Workers Union, it was out of choice. The guy who worked next to me was a member of the Miscellaneous Workers Union and the girl working on the other side of the machine was not in a union at all. We had that choice. The fundamental principle that we have built our society on is the freedom of choice to belong or not to belong.

Let us look at this Bill, and I thank members of the Australian Labor Party for their confidence in my ability. I know that I have a bit of a fan club with the member for Archerfield and the member for Kurwongbah who count the words in my speeches and report them back to me, but even the great Shaun Nelson cannot digest something like this very large Bill in two weeks and come back to this House to report on it with any confidence. I am sorry but it is a bit too thick for me to get through in that amount of time. Again, I thank the Australian Labor Party for its confidence in my ability, but I am sorry to say that with my meagre resources the union bosses cannot beat me over the head with something like this and get me to vote on it. That will not work. The parts of the Bill that I have read have caused me surprise and anger to say the least, but I will not vote for it simply because I was not given enough time to read the details. They can put that into their planning book.

Very few people who live on the tablelands would be members of the trade union movement, but I am not here to bash members of trade unions. Just like union bosses, last night the AWU faction sang and danced in the Stranger's Bar while the workers—the members of the coalition and the Independent members of the House—toiled away in here. It is a typical reaction for the worker to get angry. In a few cases, especially in Queensland, workers have used their right to say whether they do or do not want certain things to happen in their workplace. I am the first to support trade unionism. I believe that it is necessary; some people would even call it a necessary evil. It is necessary to have some sort of representation of workers' rights in the workplace, but an important factor that was related to me by one of my constituents is that without employers there will be no employees. The simple fact is that any job is better than no job. If we cannot give employers the confidence that they will be able to run their businesses to the best of their ability and in the way that they want to run them, of course they will not invest their money in Queensland, they will go to a State that is a little more employer friendly.

Yesterday, the ABC reported—

"Seasonally adjusted figures for Queensland show the unemployment rate has increased to 8.3%, up from last month's figure of 7.8%."

I do not hear any interjections, so I take it that the ABC must not be lying to us and that this must not be a media beat-up but actually must be true. Therefore, the introduction of this Bill will see a jump in the unemployment rate.

Mr Hayward interjected.

Mr NELSON: I will not indulge in any rabid conspiracy theories. We will see an increase in the unemployment rate, despite the fact that the Premier tells us that it will decrease. Therefore, somebody is not giving us the whole story—either the ABC or the Premier.

Like many members on this side of the House, there are numerous points that I would like to raise about this Bill, but when debating any industrial relations Bill we should ensure that we take into account workers' rights. Unlike the member for Burdekin and other members of the House, personally I do not have any religious beliefs at all. I put on the record that I do not care what consenting adults do behind closed doors. That is of no concern to me, so long as it is legal. Therefore, I do not think that it is important that this House debates anyone's sexuality or sexual preferences. So long as it involves consenting adults and is legal, I have no problems with it. However, it is very dangerous to try to entrench in industrial legislation sexuality and the different issues associated with that. Homosexuality is already a burning issue in society and it already creates great emotional conflict, as we saw last night. I know people, whom I call friends, whose sexual preferences are known to me—and that is something that I would not partake of or indulge in. I believe that there is something to be said for the sort of relationship that, for example, my parents had. I was brought up in a traditional family unit and there is something to be said for that. Every member of this House——

Mr Dalgleish: On this side.

Mr NELSON: No, members on the other side as well. Most members of the House are family people and support the traditional family unit. Being a young person, I have come to accept that people have ideas towards sexuality different from mine. Although the member for Barron River made some very valid points about fairness and equity, I do not think that an industrial relations Bill provides the forum to have that debate. It is certainly an important issue that needs to be addressed in a modern society. As a 26 year old working in the Department of Defence, I had to work next to people with different sexual persuasions to me. Being a country boy who was brought up in quite a different environment, at first it was hard for me to accept. However, it was not my place to judge their preferences. I know that I am getting a few frowns from members in the Chamber. Even though I personally do not agree with it, I do not think it is for me to make a crucial judgment on whether these people deserve rights in the community equal or similar to——

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! The member is testing the Chair's ability to understand how he is referring to the Bill.

Mr NELSON: I think this is covered under clause 110 of the Bill. It is certainly important to me. I am trying to get to the point.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I have read that clause, and I think the member is still drawing a very long bow in relation to the arguments he is pursuing.

Mr NELSON: I will get to the point. The inclusion of this provision in the Industrial Relations Bill—legislation that I cannot support—will mean that I will be voting against giving a fair go to every citizen of this State regardless of their race, colour, creed or sexual preference. I wish to put on record that, although I believe in giving everyone a fair go and would not judge somebody just because of what they do behind a closed door as a consenting adult, I do not believe that this is the right forum in which to address this issue.

I do not believe that this Bill will provide stability for the State of Queensland. I will now refer to the comments of another tablelander. Firstly, he said that Labor factions are very formalised and always visible. Secondly, he stated that the Labor Party provides ideological shelter for almost any group that is not primarily based on self-interest and so the potential for disputes is infinitely greater than that of our opponents. Thirdly—and as a corollary to the second point—he stated that all of the factions of the conservative parties have a common denominator, that is, self-interest, and generally wish to preserve the status quo, and so the potential for factional disputes based on ideology is not high.

The research report states also that the monolithic nature of factions draws into disputes individuals who might otherwise remain uncommitted in the particular conflict, and the more widespread the dispute, the more likely it will be that it will ultimately be translated into rejection at the ballot box. Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sure that you would probably remember that for many years the Labor Party did not have a great foothold in this House. That was mainly linked to the Labor Party's inability to control factional warfare at the time. The coalition was probably able to beat down factional warfare by virtue of the National Party's ability to govern in its own right. The message that that sends to anybody who

studies politics is that even today factionalism will be rejected by the State of Queensland. No-one would deny the fact that the Australian Labor Party can hold power in its own right in the State of Queensland. However, it will be a long time before that is able to be said of the National Party. The simple fact remains that that factional infighting will be viewed by members of the community, especially members of the rural community, as being unacceptable and as discouraging stability in Government.

I believe that the factional system has been a success story for the Australian Labor Party and that it has worked on some occasions. However, on this occasion we can see the rift quite clearly. According to the list of speakers, only one or two members of the AWU will be speaking to this Bill. They are remaining adamantly quiet. On Monday, we will see whether Bill Ludwig is browbeaten and thrown to the ground by the Premier. I believe the Premier has won his battle and beaten the AWU into submission. I congratulate him on that massive achievement. However, the simple fact remains that there is a dispute and some members of the Labor Party believe that you don't get angry, you get even. I do not think anyone who has studied trade unionism or factionalism in this State would rate highly the chances of seeing a highly disciplined and rigid Australian Labor Party going into the next election. I predict that we will see paybacks at the end of the Premier's term.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, I believe that trade unionism is important. However, I think we are long past the days of children going down into coalmines. The other side of the House indulges in a fair bit of farmer bashing. But a lot of farmers are saying to me, "Coalminers get a hundred grand a year to go down into those coalmines. They are not exactly living on the poverty line—a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. What is all of the fuss about?" As I said before, trade unionism is important in most workplaces. As I said, I worked as a security guard at the Canberra Airport. On the advice of friends, I joined the Transport Workers Union—

Mr Paff: Not another one. You've been everywhere.

Mr NELSON: I certainly have led a long and interesting life in 26 years.

Mr Dalgleish: Short.

Mr NELSON: It has been very short but very interesting.

I was a member of the Transport Workers Union in the ACT. A friend of mine, who was working next to me, was a member of the Miscellaneous Workers Union. The person working on the other side of the machine was not in a trade union. We all got on well. I did not have any qualms about that whatsoever. The only people who ever seemed to have any trouble with it were the union representatives who, every once in a while, used to come around and have a bit of a whinge about unity in the workplace and so on. The point is that we had freedom of choice; we could choose to do what we wanted. To me that is of fundamental importance. In Queensland we should not be entrenching any sort of legislation that will force people, as we have heard before, into the 1950s mentality of no ticket, no start.

I am trying to phrase these issues as questions. I hope the Minister has taken on board not only my speech but also those made by members of the coalition. I hope he can address some of these issues. As I said before, I am a very busy person and I did not have time to address the important issues in my electorate and also read industrial relations legislation that is one and a half to two inches thick. Again, my office consists of me and only one electorate officer. Unlike the member for Nicklin, I do not have access to any support staff. Therefore, if I wanted to find out about the Bill, I had either to get a briefing—and many of the briefings I have had before are highly—

Mr Hamill: Let me tell you that that is exactly the way we had to operate for the whole period of the time we were in Opposition.

Mr NELSON: I thank the honourable member for his confidence in my ability. I have the utmost respect for many of the members of the Australian Labor Party who stayed in this House through the Sir Joh years and the days of the cricket team. It must have been a trying time. Being in the situation I am in today, I can empathise with them. But they fought on. I was brought up to think of Sir Joh as almost a cult or hero figure. To me he was a great man and a great Queenslanders who held this State together. Time and time again people tell me that those years were great years for Queensland and that we were a fantastic State.

Mr Paff: What's that got to do with industrial relations?

Mr NELSON: I know that the member for Ipswich West could not care less about industrial relations, but I certainly have some concerns that I would like to address, because people in my electorate are concerned about how industrial relations and this Bill will affect small businesses on the tablelands, such as sawmilling operations and independent mining operations—not that there are many of those left. Hopefully, given the geophysical surveys that are being done at the moment, one day we will see their return.

Again, I do not want to see rampant trade unionism in this State; in reality, I do not think anyone does. I think we should have freedom of choice. I think that, if a person in a workplace wants to

join his trade union and he wants to support it and do that in no uncertain terms, that is a fine thing. I think he should be allowed to and I think that, in some cases, he should even be encouraged, because there are certain scurrilous employers out there who try to drive the working man into the ground.

There are many employers who work very hard for their money, who work day in, day out and spend a hell of a lot of their own personal funds on getting their businesses up and running. They do not need to be discouraged from doing that, because small business is the engine room of employment in this State. Again, I draw the attention of honourable members to the jobless rate that has jumped back from 7.8% to 8.3%. I say that, with any luck, this Industrial Relations Bill can be changed in places and the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations will address some of the issues that have not only been raised by me, but raised by other members on this side of the House. Hopefully, with any luck, we can reach some sort of compromise in the future.
