



Speech by

Mr T. SULLIVAN

MEMBER FOR CHERMSIDE

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WORKCOVER QUEENSLAND AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SULLIVAN (Chermside—ALP) (10.24 p.m.): I rise to support the WorkCover Amendment Bill. In this debate we have heard frequent references by Opposition members to the compo culture, which was referred to by Kennedy in his report. Kennedy mentioned a number of things in that report—rofts by workers, rofts by compo doctors and rofts by employers who did not pay their due fees. Yet the Opposition focused almost exclusively on the worker—more worker bashing and union bashing by members opposite, led in particular by that person in this House who is so well known for his hatred of unions and unionists. We have heard very little about the medical profession or about the employers who ignored their responsibility and created problems in this area. Those opposite picked on the worker—typical of the unbalanced approach they have taken.

The coalition placed considerable emphasis on those who have to pay. They kept saying, "You have to remember those who have to pay." Well, let us remember others who also have to pay. It is not just about those who have to pay some increased premiums but also about those workers who have to pay a terrible price in the form of death and injury, especially those who are left on fixed incomes.

In Australia there are roughly 500 traumatic deaths per year in the workplace. We are not talking about someone who happens to have a heart attack on the job or about someone who dies while at work. We are talking about traumatic deaths that are attributable to the workplace. In Queensland alone in 1997 there were 83 traumatic deaths—violent workplace deaths. The National Party members, the Liberal Party members, the One Nation members and some of the Independent members of this House do not seem to count these as a cost. They ignore the families of those 83 dead workers.

If we add to this figure those workers who are seriously injured, we see that there are thousands of Queensland families that pay an enormous personal cost. All we have heard from members opposite is, "There are going to be some increased rates. There are going to be some increased premiums. Our businesses cannot afford that." Honourable members opposite should tell me how the families will be able to afford to live when the income earner is dead or seriously injured and proper compensation is not available. This is the sort of thing that has been coming out of the mouths of members opposite, and that is why they are in Opposition and deserve to stay there.

The member for Callide challenged Government members by saying, "What would you know about it? You have never put your hand up to risk your own money." Well, obviously he did not know about my family, which had been in small business for 70 years. My father was a shopkeeper and was in the catering/hospitality industry. As kids, at the age of only eight and nine we were serving in the shops. By the time we were 14 we were picking up glasses in the bars, at 15 we were pulling beer and by the time we were 17 we were managing a bar.

We knew what it was like to take the risks and face the uncertainty of a small family business. One thing we also knew—some members opposite were bellyaching about this—was that we always paid award wages, we paid full entitlements and we paid all taxes and charges, including workers compensation. We still made a profit which kept four families going in a family business for more than 70 years.

We had some very difficult times but, unlike some of the farmers opposite, there was no drought relief scheme when we had lousy weather and the people did not come to the show and we

had no profits for a year. We simply did without. We did not go into some rural reconstruction fund to help our business. If the people did not come because of bad weather, that was it.

Mr Baumann: You are bagging the cockies.

Mr SULLIVAN: I am not bagging the cockies. I am saying to the member for Albert that rural constituents have at their disposal certain funding schemes to help when the weather is poor or things do not go well. People in the city do not have that. My family was a perfect example. If it rained for 10 days during the show, we had a lousy year. Four families had a lousy income for the whole year. We had no fund to go to for financial assistance. We understood what it was like.

The coalition opposed and wound back journey claims, which affected in particular working women who dropped their children to school or to child-care centres. This was an anti-family stand by a hypocritical coalition that does not really care about working families.

I was appalled by the comments from Opposition members, particularly from Mr Cooper, about stress claims. They denigrated such claims as being false or a rort. Let them explain their cruel comments to the families of police officers or ambulance officers who suffer stress from the traumatic work in which they are engaged. Let the National Party members explain their callous remarks to depressed farmers and graziers, some of whom have suffered so much stress that they have done themselves serious self-harm. Let them face an attendant at a convenience store who has been held up by a criminal and let them tell that person that their stress is just a rort. What members opposite have said is an absolute disgrace. It shows a total disregard for personal suffering.

This Bill strikes a balance between the worker and the employer and between personal costs and financial costs. Labor Party members proudly support legislation which gives legitimate protection to working men and women. I support the Bill and congratulate the Minister and his department on the work that has gone into it. Queenslanders will benefit from this good legislation.
