



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BILL

Mr ELLIOTT (Cunningham—NPA) (11.20 a.m.): I wish to touch on a few things here today. Honourable members on the other side of the House might all wonder why we are all so concerned and why we are all prepared to be speaking on this Bill. If one looks at it and asks oneself that, one comes up with one word, and that is "balance". Some on this side of the House have had industrial tickets. I was a member of the AWU when I first left school and, as such, I have probably at least had some experience with the trade union movement and perhaps can understand it a little better than others do. The thing that really concerns me is that the Government is turning the clock back.

I just wish to recount a conversation that I had with a New South Wales businessman in the last few days. It is quite an unfortunate situation and I will just detail it to honourable members because I think it is very relevant. It is an analogy that we all need to look at. This gentleman moves houses; he moves buildings. He has done so for many years. He is probably one of the most reliable and reputable operators in the greater Sydney area. Over many years he has built up a very good plant and he has a very good work force. He does everything to the letter of the law, and he does it well.

Recently the Government put out a tender to move a building because a road was to be built there. This fellow did not submit a tender. The department involved rang him up and asked him why he had not put in a tender for this job. They said, "You are the bloke we really want. You are the bloke who will do the job best. Why have you not tendered for the job?" He said, "I will put it to you this way: if I was going to do that job for you 20 years ago, you would have required me to fill in two pages for the tender document, but now you hand me a document which has nearly 300 pages. I would think it is self-explanatory. When you look at all of the criteria you require me to address in this tender document in relation to WorkCover, site agreements, asbestos"—and he just went on and on and on with all these politically correct and industrial relations type situations——

Mr Veivers: Garbage.

Mr ELLIOTT: Garbage, exactly. My colleague from down the coast the member for Southport says "garbage". He is right, unfortunately. If we continue down this road and if the Government continues to wind the clock back in respect of industrial relations, it will push so many people out of business altogether. People have had it up to the back teeth.

I had another interesting conversation with a guy with whom I actually went to school. He and his brothers and another friend of theirs developed a very big real estate operation. I will not embarrass them by mentioning the name, but many members would know of their firm. Quite frankly, this bloke has also had it up to the back teeth. With friends they had a discussion about where their businesses were going over the next five years. One of them said, "You are all away with the pixies", and the others asked why. He said, "Ask me how many people I employ now. I employ 200-odd. How many people am I going to employ next year?" They asked, "How many?" He said, "We will be lucky if we employ 80. The next year we will employ fewer than that again and by the year after that I will be down to employing one secretary to keep my business affairs in order and to ensure that I am able to lodge my tax correctly. I will not employ anyone else." They asked, "Why on earth are you going to do that?" He said, "Because Governments have made it impossible to do business because of the red tape that they are putting in place and all of the problems that they throw up in respect of running businesses, particularly in the industrial relations and WorkCover areas. It is not worth doing business any more. It is too difficult. It is fraught with so much potential litigation."

Mr Mulherin: Get rid of all the regulations?

Mr ELLIOTT: No, I am not suggesting that we get rid of all the regulations. But the Government is going overboard. This legislation is another case in point. It has already done that with the WorkCover legislation. It is setting the bar too high. It is not getting any balance in it. That is why I use the word "balance". That is where we have to look.

Quite frankly, some Government members think that the job opportunities will be created by multinational corporations. Sure, there are some good statistics coming through, and the Federal Government is pleased to see some of the employment that has been created by the big companies. That is all very laudable. I take my hat off to them. I am not necessarily a fan of Howard or Costello, but I do believe they have done a good job in respect of the economy. However, when it comes to a lot of other areas, they have not been game to bite the bullet. I am not talking about the level playing field, because I am not a level playing field man at all.

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr ELLIOTT: That is right.

It is of great concern to me that the people opposite seem to think that they can get out a big stick and bludgeon small business into employing more people. If they do not make it easier for small business to employ people, believe me, small business will employ fewer people; they may not even continue to employ the number of people they do now.

Back in the seventies, I used to employ 27 people. I, for one, do not want to employ anyone anymore—not on a full-time basis. It is all too hard. It is just the greatest pain.

Mr Veivers: It's a nightmare.

Mr ELLIOTT: It is a nightmare. It is the greatest pain in the backside.

I am a reasonably affable type. I get on pretty well with people. I do not have a problem with getting on with anyone with whom I work. I am one of those people who enjoys working with my hands with the people who work for me. Quite frankly, the only way I am going to employ anyone in the future is on a subcontract basis. I want people who own their own vehicle, I want them to own their own equipment and I want them to insure themselves in respect of WorkCover. Otherwise, I would have to employ another person altogether to do my books, to do the tax, to do WorkCover, to do all of the other areas that are involved in employing people. I would have to employ a full-time person who did nothing else other than just doing the book work.

What do honourable members think I am going to have to pay someone of that calibre to do that? It is going to cost me at least \$40,000 a year to employ that person. How much money do honourable members think I can make, whether it is contract harvesting or something else? You are damned lucky if you can make that sort of money. Some years you are lucky if you make \$50,000 out of it. Why would someone want to employ a person to have to do all that? The Government has to sit down and forget about ideology. All of us in this House understand that we have different ideologies and we come from different directions. But surely we are all interested in trying to develop a situation in this State and nation that increases the number of people being employed, particularly the number of young people.

If honourable members do not want that, then they should not be in this place. I am sure all of us are striving for the one goal, that is, to employ more people. Unfortunately, because the Government has allowed its ideology to push it to the point that it believes it has to fall over itself to say, "Look what a good Government I am; I am protecting your interests", it takes for granted that people on wages do not have the ability to look after themselves.

I think politicians underestimate the intelligence of the electorate to a great degree in the same way that, in the industrial relations area, the Government underestimates the intellect of working people. Workers are much better educated today than they were 30 or 40 years ago. In the old days, when it was in its heyday and at the height of its power, the AWU did a great service for people. It was needed because, quite frankly, people used to abuse and undermine the work force and do terrible things. I do not doubt that there is still the odd person like that around today, but this work force is more intelligent, better educated and quite capable of sorting out whether or not they want to work for particular people.

I do not believe for a minute that we need to go to the lengths that this Government is going to today to turn the industrial relations clock back and try to tilt the playing field in the favour of the employees to the degree that this Bill does. If the Government continues to do that, I do not believe it will be able to increase the work force in Queensland at all.

As the member for Tablelands said earlier, the engine room of employment is, after all, private sector employees. That is small business. If half the small businesses put on one extra person tomorrow, the unemployment situation in this State would be quite reasonable. For goodness' sake, let us all for a change stop playing politics, stop looking at things from an ideological viewpoint and try to get practical and get some more people, particularly young people, into work.

I would love to put on someone young and train them. I enjoy training people. A young fellow worked for me just before I came into this House for the first time. He was a diesel fitter who had been an apprentice with a company. He worked for me for a lot of years. Then, quite rightly, someone offered

him a really good job on top money. He has had a wonderful career. He has done very well. At the time I was probably a bit miffed that he went off and worked for someone else, but surely that is what training people is all about. Employers should be happy for people to progress, to get on in life and to do well. The gentleman I referred to has done very well and has made a lot of money as a manager of a property. He has a lot of ability.

I call on the Government to look at that issue. It should revisit the WorkCover issue. WorkCover is another area that is making things more and more difficult. Members heard my colleague the member for Warwick instancing Warwick Bacon. If Warwick Bacon is winning awards in respect of its safety record——

Mr Hegarty: Bringing home the bacon.

Mr ELLIOTT: Exactly. What sort of problem do we have if a firm with a record like that has to pay more for WorkCover each year?

Mr Braddy: You brought it in.

Mr ELLIOTT: I was trying to get us to stop looking at ideology and trying to be practical. The Minister is taking a tiny fraction of time and is trying to score a political point instead of looking at the situation which developed under the previous Labor Government, then the coalition in Government and now Labor again. Surely we should all look at WorkCover and say to ourselves that we have to address the problem and try not to overdo compensation. We need to ensure that people are protected, but these massive claims are over the top. They are not practical, they are not sensible and the end result is that WorkCover is becoming a nightmare. It is tremendously important to look at this issue.

The same issues are involved in relation to big companies. A big multinational corporation can afford to make its own insurance arrangements. It can set up a much cheaper operation than could I or someone else in small business who has to go through the Government scheme. Small businesses are being hit to leg by these changes.

The Government is making it too difficult for people to be employed. All Government members should go home, take a cold bath, have a look at what they are doing and ask themselves truly whether they are just reacting to their trade union people, who push and shove and tend to pull the strings in respect of the ALP, or whether they are genuinely interested in employing more people, particularly young people. Then they should address the problem, do something practical about it and revisit this legislation soon.

This legislation turns the clock back, making it more difficult to employ people. That is why so many of my colleagues feel so strongly about this legislation and are prepared to stand up here and talk about it. I was here until after two this morning and I did not get an opportunity to speak, but I was prepared to sit here to wait for my turn to speak on this legislation.

As I said, I was an AWU ticket holder. I was a member of a union. I worked in the wool sheds.

Mr Palaszczuk: What was the number of your ticket? A real AWU member would remember.

Mr ELLIOTT: I have a slight case of Alzheimer's.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! Would members let the honourable member wander on with his speech, please?

Mr ELLIOTT: I think it is important that we look at this legislation and ensure that we work towards employing more people, not fewer.
