



Speech by

GEOFF WILSON

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Hansard 9 November 2000

COOKE INQUIRY

Mr WILSON (Ferry Grove—ALP) (6.49 p.m.): I support the amendment to the motion. In 1998 the Beattie Government established a tripartite and independent industrial relations task force to review the previous Government's legislation and to make recommendations on a new industrial relations system which reflected and accommodated the emerging new labour market. But we will hear nothing of any substance from members of the coalition about the report of that task force, because they do not want to know about it. It is too much a part of the real world.

It is important to note that the task force was independent and representative. It was chaired by a noted industrial relations expert, Professor Margaret Gardner, and drew equal representation from unions and employer organisations. Professor Ron McCallum, a noted expert in industrial law, was another independent member of that task force. The task force carefully considered issues associated with the regulation of industrial organisations. It also considered submissions from organisations and individuals about the operation of the provisions of the 1997 Workplace Relations Act.

It is important to note that the task force was not driven by an ideological agenda with predetermined views of the roles of unions, nor was it stacked with pro-union or anti-union members. It was drawn from a cross-section of representatives of all industrial organisations throughout the length and breadth of Queensland. It reached its recommendations in the light of an understanding of the issues and the evidence and arguments put by organisations and individuals who made submissions.

Equally important is the fact that the task force had access to information about the history of the regulation of industrial organisations in Queensland, including the findings of the Hangar and the Cooke inquiries. The task force subsequently made 166 recommendations, 34 of which dealt with the regulation of industrial organisations. Of these, 28 were adopted by the Government in legislation. But the Opposition is totally silent on those things. The recommendations provided a strong foundation for democratic and accountable industrial organisations. The Opposition is also silent about the fact that the task force comprised a broadly representative cross-section of industrial organisations throughout Queensland.

Recommendations adopted by the Government with respect to union elections included the retention of model election rules; access to the roll of members entitled to vote; candidates being given a copy of the roll; a requirement to specify before an election the process to be used to decide the outcome, that is, first-past-the-post or preferential voting; rolls for elections to be cut-off rolls; prohibitions on organisations favouring one candidate over another; prohibiting a person from disadvantaging another person in relation to an election; provision for the Queensland Electoral Commission to conduct elections which will be paid for by the State; and regulations prescribing the material that candidates can publish to prevent publication of misleading statements. The Opposition is totally silent tonight about those reforms. They are opposed to them.

The provisions of the Act with respect to union elections were also consistent with the recommendations of a 1997 Commonwealth standing committee on electoral matters and a report prepared by Blake Dawson Waldron for the Federal Government on a review of current arrangements for the governance of industrial organisations. Not a word has been said by the Opposition about those two reports.

Members opposite may recall that the Federal Government at that time was the Howard Government, a Government not known for its support of unions; indeed, a Government that displays what its real industrial principles are by the way in which it practises industrial relations, best demonstrated by the waterfront maritime dispute of two years' standing.

On the issue of the accountability of industrial organisations, the task force recommendations that were adopted in our legislation—and the members opposite are silent about these as well, or if they do not like it they ignore it—were that accounting practices should accord with Australian accounting standards; an organisation need only record the total amounts spent on professional services; only the total of compulsory levies and voluntary contributions needs to be listed in accounts; officers' remuneration should be recorded in banded amounts, and so on. I strongly support the amendment to this motion.

Time expired.
