



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH**

---

Hansard 18 October 2001

**WORKCOVER QUEENSLAND AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs PRATT** (Nanango—Ind) (4.46 p.m.): The main purpose of any workers compensation— not just in Queensland but throughout Australia—is to protect workers when they are injured in their place of employment. I acknowledge that the government's idea is to give maximum compensation to seriously injured workers and the dependants of fatally injured workers. Too often we have seen how claim proceedings have dragged on interminably, and often the perception is that the death of the claimant is perhaps the aim of the whole exercise. It is hoped that any legislation which can solve this appalling situation will be viewed carefully by all members of the House. After having been an employer, it never ceases to amaze me how it is always assumed that employers can be bled just because they have had the intestinal fortitude to get out there and have a go. I can assure most members of this House that that is not necessarily the case.

After the last rise in WorkCover premiums, many employers did in fact state that these rises would affect their intention to replace existing employees when they left. This may equate to only one employer at one place of employment, but multiplying that across all businesses throughout the state would in fact mean that a reasonable number would have to join the dole queues. I know those opposite say, 'There they go again, saying it's going to cost jobs,' but I give them the example of one small business in my area which used to employ three people. It now employs one lone contractor, thereby eliminating many of the costs associated with employing. The employer said, 'It's just not worth it anymore. Fees and charges are killing me, and I'd rather stay small.' So those opposite should not kid themselves: jobs will be lost.

It grieves me to hear Labor members continually make the idiotic statement—a statement that they honestly cannot believe themselves—that they are the only members who care about workers. In the time I have been in this House it is this government that has continually put in place legislation which has robbed workers of their employment. I do not have to name them; members have only to cast their minds back to the incredible number of marches on this parliament over the past few years. Unfortunately, most of the jobs that are going are those in rural and regional Queensland—not all, but most. So please stop sprouting that garbage, because it does not impress the people who have been tossed on the scrap heap. This government is forever stating the number of jobs it creates, whether they be full time, casual or just an hour a day. Only people juggling figures would see one hour of work a day as a job. Why don't those opposite be totally honest and give us the true number of jobs lost at the same time as they praise themselves for job creation?

No-one denies that workers have to be protected. Believe me, it is every employer's ambition not to have injured workers. No employer can afford not to care. It would be a fool who did not do their utmost to protect themselves and their employees, but it must be a mutual obligation. There must be a shared commitment between employer and employee. It is almost a symbiotic relationship. Many an instance has occurred of employers being taken to court, even having supplied the various needs to protect their workers—hats, gloves, protective clothing or sunscreen—but the employee has basically made his or her decision not to wear the supplied gear. There should be as much importance placed on employee negligence as on employer negligence.

Although I endorse many aspects of this bill, I do have concerns about others. I do not know of anyone who would deny that WorkCover is an essential part of looking after the welfare of all employees, and in tragic circumstances their families, but I am not so sure that this bill looks at the big picture. Unfortunately for me, I am able to see both sides of this debate. While recognising the

concerns of the opposition, I acknowledge the government's reasoning behind the bill. I have been torn between both valid arguments. Although my heart would vote for this bill, my concerns for employees and employers as a whole caused me to hesitate. WorkCover as it is has its faults and this bill has its faults. It needs to be more balanced. It pains me to not be able to support this bill wholeheartedly, but I will support it with reservations.

---