



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Hansard 3 April 2001

COAL INDUSTRY

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (12.27 p.m.): The current coal industry dispute is not about what miners get in their pay packets. The dispute in central Queensland is about mineworkers and their need for job security. Mineworkers have told me in the last few days that they would be prepared to accept less than what BHP is offering in salary if they had a real commitment to job security.

What we are seeing in central Queensland at the moment is just how ruthless BHP is in demanding that unionists surrender security of employment and anti-victimisation provisions. What BHP wants is part-time, fixed-time, temporary workers or contractors, or what would be a casualised work force—employment on demand. BHP wants to be able to use contractors under any conditions—contractors who are prepared to work multiple 12-hour shifts, despite the risks to themselves and other workers and despite the risks to their own long-term health. BHP wants to be able to pay a market rate in wages—a market rate that is determined by the mining companies themselves.

The spin that BHP management puts to the public when there is a major dispute in the coal industry is always focused on the wages of mineworkers—how much they earn and how much BHP is offering. It never talks about the attack on permanent employment opportunities or about the loss of apprenticeships and traineeships for the young people of our region. It never talks about the multiplier effect of job losses across the region. It is very quick to talk about the number of jobs that are created with a new mine, but it never says a word about the number of jobs that will be lost when it closes a mine or cuts permanent jobs.

BHP is anti-worker and anti-family. Throughout this dispute, BHP has used hired goons to constantly harass and intimidate workers and their families. Of course, Ricky Gazzard, the Queensland manager, will deny these claims; but he has proven to us over many months that he has a long history of denial.

Security officers have photographed homes. These low-lives have followed women and children to school and shopping centres. And only last Friday, three of those goons were parading around the Dysart shopping centre with two-way radios. Workers have been forced to accept the humiliation of having video cameras shoved in their faces by security company heavies. Small businesses are under surveillance because they dare to support the picket lines with food and other means of support.

Workers have had car registration numbers taken but are banned by the courts from taking photographs themselves. Workers cannot verbally attack management and the scabs who cross the picket lines, and union leaders are banned from taking certain actions. So if the company does not like it, it goes to the courts. But it gives a free rein to those goons who are wandering around places such as Dysart and Moranbah.

Mr Lucas: Un-Australian.

Mr PEARCE: It is un-Australian, and it is unacceptable to people in central Queensland. BHP has done everything to provoke the continuation of this dispute. Only last week, BHP refused—

Time expired.
