



Speech by

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (11.49 a.m.): I am pleased to speak in support of the Industrial Relations and Another Act Amendment Bill 2001. The improvements to long service entitlements in this bill signal a positive start to the government's industrial relations agenda for the second term. During its first term, the government put in place the most forward looking industrial laws in the country. These new laws recognise that industrial relations has both an economic and social dimension. It cannot be viewed simply as a mechanism for improving the bottom line because, much more fundamentally, industrial relations is about how we live, how we work and how we interact as a community.

The Industrial Relations Act 1999 therefore seeks to balance economic and social objectives in a way that reflects the changes that have occurred in the workplace and the community. Over the past decade or so we have seen a major transformation in the labour market. Familiar notions of standard time employment and permanent jobs for life have disappeared for large sections of the work force. We now have more casual, part-time and contract employment. Many people are working longer and harder hours. Female employment has increased dramatically. New industries such as IT and biotechnology have emerged.

The unchecked deregulation of the labour market promoted by the conservative side of politics did not provide the answers for dealing with these new trends and developments. It was time for a change. New perspectives needed to be developed. That is why, for example, Queensland is legislating for the first time to ensure that all workers, whether or not they are covered by an award or an agreement, have access to essential community standards of employment such as annual leave, sick leave, parental and carer's leave and bereavement leave. To ensure that these conditions remain relevant to community standards the legislation provided the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission with a key role in reviewing these entitlements.

In the case of long service leave, the current entitlement has been unchanged since 1964—more than 35 years ago. To ensure that this entitlement was treated as a priority issue for review, the legislation provided for this review to occur before 30 June 2000. During the review, the Full Bench heard evidence outlining the extent of changes that have occurred in the labour market since the entitlement was last changed. The Queensland government and other parties argued that the entitlements should be updated to reflect these changes.

These arguments proved persuasive. In its decision the QIRC found that 10 years is now a long time for an employee to spend with an employer. Having legislated for the review, the government committed itself to implementing the result of that review in full and ensuring that the benefits of the enhanced entitlement were made available to all Queensland workers. The government, with the full support of the major parties who took part in the review, decided that legislation would be the best means of doing this. The government therefore begins this second term with legislative amendments that provide real benefits to working people in Queensland.

The demands of balancing work, family and life in a modern day world are one of the key policy changes confronting us over the coming years. The provision of reasonable leave entitlements that respond to contemporary circumstances is just one step we can take towards addressing these issues. Under the amendments, employees can now look forward to having earlier access to long service

leave, which will be provided five years earlier. This will ensure that a number of workers previously denied access will now enjoy that benefit.

At the same time, these are responsible enhancements that recognise the cost imperatives facing employers. I note that the new entitlement does not increase the rate at which leave accrues and that there are transitional arrangements to phase in the changes. As these amendments demonstrate, Labor will continue to work towards achieving fair and balanced workplace laws which recognise the need to balance both economic and social objectives and which keep pace with today's rapidly changing labour market.

I commend the bill to the House.
