



Speech by

Mr P. PURCELL

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (12.25 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Industrial Relations and Another Act Amendment Bill, currently before the House. I will make a few comments about long service leave. It is good to see these improvements recommended by the Industrial Relations Commission in this bill, although I believe the full bench could have been a little more courageous. As most speakers in this debate have identified, work practices in Australia have changed enormously. As the member for Bundamba just said, it is 37 years since this act has been looked at and any improvements for workers made.

If honourable members compare the work practices of 37 years ago with the work practices of today, they will realise that there is no comparison. Thirty-seven years ago all people were employed on a permanent basis. They had some chance of getting long service leave. Today they have just about no chance. Most industries in the blue-collar area—

Mr Schwarten: There were no labour hire companies back then.

Mr PURCELL: As the member for Rockhampton said, there were no labour hire companies back then.

The number of people who are employed on a permanent basis at the moment is very, very small. I would be very surprised if half the work force is currently employed permanently. They are the only people who have some chance of getting long service leave. As we know, the minister recently improved portable long service leave provisions. That scheme operates in the building industry—predominantly for blue-collar workers. Even going back 20 years, those workers would have had no chance of getting long service leave. They were denied a condition of employment that other workers in this state and this country enjoyed for many years.

It is great to see that under this bill the work of casuals and people who work on a part-time basis and people's service to a particular industry or employer will be recognised. The bill also clarifies that the provisions relating to the calculation of leave for casual employees also relate to part-time employees and those who have at any time during the period of continuous service worked as a part-time or casual. So those people now have some chance of getting that service recognised for the purposes of long service leave.

Most members in this House would recognise that people are now working longer hours for less pay. In relation to conditions of employment, as I said, the full bench should have been a little more courageous and possibly made the 13 weeks long service leave available after 10 years. It has certainly made long service leave more accessible for people who leave an industry due to an employer terminating their services, illness or the industry closing down. If they are unfortunate enough to die, that money will now go into their estate.

These days, only those people who belong to strong unions have overtime clauses in their agreements or awards. The wharfies, the miners and those who belong to the Builders Labourers Federation or the CFMEU have overtime clauses in their awards. If honourable members look at provisions relating to employees in the retail sector and to a lot of public servants, they will see that all those provisions have been taken out. Slowly but surely those provisions are whittled away because

they have been cashed in. So people are working a lot more hours for less pay. Changes to long service leave could be used as a way of levelling that.

I found it strange that the member for Caloundra had the audacity to come into this place and attack a Labor government over its treatment of the Industrial Relations Commission. Industrial Relations Commissions were introduced by Labor governments. That is why the Labor government is—

Mrs SHELDON: I rise to a point of order. The member is misrepresenting me. I find it offensive and I ask him to withdraw it. These amendments that have just been dropped in the House do exactly what I said they would: they nobble the commission, and those opposite are allowing it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Poole): Order! There is no point of order.

Mrs SHELDON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I ask for that comment to be withdrawn. I found the comment that we do not support workers offensive. I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr Schwarten: What's she talking about?

Mrs SHELDON: His words.

Mr Schwarten: What words?

Mrs SHELDON: You should listen to them occasionally, Mr Schwarten, instead of being a pugilist.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Caloundra will resume her seat.

Mr Livingstone: What did you say? Which words do you want withdrawn?

Mrs SHELDON: I found it offensive and I ask it to be withdrawn.

Mr Schwarten: What? What do you want withdrawn?

Mrs Sheldon: Listen in future and you'll find out.

Mr PURCELL: I do not know what the member found offensive. However, I said that the member attacked a Labor government for not supporting the Industrial Relations Commission.

Mrs SHELDON: That is exactly what I found offensive, because those opposite are nobbling the Industrial Relations Commission by their amendments. I ask the member to withdraw an untrue statement.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is nothing personal contained in this. The member will resume her seat.

Mr PURCELL: I find it very strange that anybody on the Liberal side of politics could utter anything about the Industrial Relations Commission and not choke on their words, particularly the member for Caloundra. Those opposite have not supported the Industrial Relations Commission over the years. I recall a Liberal Industrial Relations Minister sacking a commissioner for the first time in history, against convention, and not reappointing him. That happened under a Liberal government.

Anybody who says that the Labor government does not support Industrial Relations Commissions does not know the facts and is stretching the truth to get a headline. How can anybody who supports Peter Reith—as the Liberal side of politics does—after what he has done to workers, that is, removed the issue of industrial relations from the realm of the Industrial Relations Commission and put it in the law courts so that employees cannot afford to defend their rights, have the audacity to come into this place and say that we do not support the Industrial Relations Commission?

Mrs Sheldon: Well, you don't.

Mr PURCELL: We certainly do, and the member saying that we do not will not change that fact. However, if those opposite got up in this place and attacked their colleague in Canberra, that is, Peter Reith, for the low person that he is and what he has done to the Industrial Relations Commission and industrial relations in this state, we would believe what they say. Just because they mouth it does not make it true. Actions would certainly help us to believe what they are saying.

Returning to the bill, there are a couple of items that I am not happy about. I refer in particular to the cashing out of long service leave. In effect, that means that employees can choose not to take long service leave but to take the money instead. I can certainly understand the reason why that situation has come about—that is, people do not have full-time employment. As a result of the way in which Peter Reith and the Liberal Party deal with industrial relations, people do not have full-time jobs. Their wages have been depressed under the Reith Liberal regime. When people are on the verge of losing their house or cannot afford to buy clothes and other items for their children, of course they would prefer to cash their long service leave entitlement in order to continue to look after their families. However, this is not a good way for us to be travelling. Long service leave was designed to enable people to take time away from the workplace in order to spend time with their families.

Once again, the Liberal Party mouths off about supporting families. However, it does not support families. If the state and federal Liberal Parties supported families, they would support workers,

their salaries and their conditions. Workers are family people. They have children. They have commitments. It is very simple what workers want: they want a reasonable chance of having a permanent job in a reasonably safe working environment that pays a decent wage which gives them some security. It is fairly simple. Of course, the other side of politics wants to attack that. It sides with employers and makes those conditions as harsh as possible.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr PURCELL: My time is up.

Mr Nuttall: Keep going.

Mr PURCELL: I have just been told my time is up.

Mr Nuttall: You go as long as you like.

Mr PURCELL: The enormous amount of information placed in front of the Full Bench supported the fact that Queensland has the least favourable conditions for long service leave. We on this side of politics will be working to rectify that in the coming years. I can assure the House that it will not be another 37 years before long service leave is looked at again. Peter Reith will not be around too much longer because at the next federal election he will lose his seat. He will be but a memory for the people of Victoria. And the way John Howard is travelling at the moment, he will lose his seat, too.

I will now state some facts with regard to the industrial relations track record of those opposite. I point out that the former Liberal industrial relations spokesman in opposition and Industrial Relations Minister in government is no longer in this place. Workers understand who supports them and who does not. The same thing will happen to the federal government when it lines up at the next election. The unemployment situation in this country is hidden because of the extent of casualisation, and that issue was raised earlier in the debate. Under the Howard-Reith plan, a worker who works two hours a month is considered to be employed, not unemployed.

Liberal members on the other side of the chamber, who like to get their hands on the Industrial Relations portfolio from time to time, think that people are employed when they work two hours a month. They ought to do something about that. Hiring people through labour hire companies casualises the work force. Those opposite supported the casualisation of the waterfront when there was a proposal to bring in individual industrial agreements, which was knocked on the head. That was a big turning point for Peter Reith. Peter Reith's power has diminished since then and will continue to diminish from now until the Howard government loses power. A Labor government will look after workers and get the economy back to where it should be.
