



Speech by

**GARY FENLON**

**MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES**

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Hansard 13 May 2003

**WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION BILL**

**Mr FENLON** (Greenslopes—ALP) (12.53 a.m.): It is a pleasure to rise this morning to speak in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Bill 2003. In doing so, I congratulate the minister on bringing this bill to the House. He continues a fine tradition in recent Australian history in the Labor movement in terms of instituting micro-economic reform in Australia. This is significant because it has been the Australian Labor Party that has been at the forefront of furthering micro-economic reform throughout this country, and history will show this. History already shows this and we are continuing to show this here in Queensland.

If we go back through recent history and compare the epoch of Labor versus conservative government at the federal level leading up to the start of the Hawke-Keating years—the Fraser years, that is—we see that nothing happened. Micro-economic reform was happening around the world, and in places like New Zealand it was already very well advanced. Major changes were already occurring throughout the New Zealand economy. They had woken up very early to the fact that micro-economic reform was essential to establishing a competitive foundation for Australia, and they had progressed far down the road before the Fraser government could even comprehend what was going on.

If we look at Australia's history, the Hawke-Keating years in particular, we see a revolution in micro-economic reform. That stands as a monument to the bravery and the foresight of those governments. Today we see the Howard government standing on the foundation built through those years, very consciously reaping the benefits of those foundations laid in previous Labor years without giving any credit to it, relying very much on the gains, the returns and the capacity of Australia to compete in the international marketplace. Those returns are being shown many fold in terms of the economic position of Australia. Much of the sound economic position that Australia now finds itself in internationally is directly accountable to those micro-economic reforms that were put in place over those years.

Queensland's history is exactly the same as Australia's when comparing Labor's record to the conservative record in terms of instituting micro-economic reform. Nothing happened in Queensland prior to 1989. Nothing happened in the conservative period from 1996 to 1998 in Queensland in terms of micro-economic reform—nothing whatsoever. It has been Labor governments at the federal level and the state level that have led the way in micro-economic reform. It is a very clear historical record.

This piece of legislation is important because it establishes another chapter in micro-economic reform in this industry. It arises from deliberations through the national competition policy at a federal level filtering through to the states. So it is with a staggering level of hypocrisy that we saw the member for Toowoomba South tonight come into this place and deliver a One Nation speech with the typical antics of the Queensland National Party. Those opposite have the luxury of being in opposition, the pathos of being in opposition—forever obviously—to be able to go out with one breath and speak on the fence of sale yards out in their electorates about how terrible these micro-economic reforms are. They can go out with one breath and make their One Nation speeches to try to placate their weak backyard against the National Party and even have the cheek to come into this House and make One Nation style speeches and knock the fundamentals of micro-economic reform that are instituted essentially from their own counterparts at a federal level.

Those opposite can forget about that conveniently; forget that many of these reforms have a genesis at the federal level with their political counterparts and come here with such hypocrisy as to

knock those reforms and seek to escape reality. They therefore have no credibility in this House to enter into this debate. They have no capacity to deal with these issues. Their policies are certainly redundant in Queensland, and it is no wonder that they are so vulnerable in their electorates, so vulnerable to attacks from the One Nation party, because they are trying to be One Nation but they really cannot cut the grade because everybody can see in Queensland that they cannot sustain it. They cannot sustain it because their federal counterparts are really the foundation of these cooperative arrangements now throughout Australia. This particular bill undertakes these reforms by starting to separate the regulatory functions from the insurance functions. As we have heard in this debate, the workers compensation area will be a candidate for a government owned corporation in the future.

We heard in this debate tonight from the member for Toowoomba South, in particular the suggestion that this is some sort of a bogey, this is something that is undesirable and cannot be tolerated, in typical One Nation tones. It is an outrageous claim. If we avoid the prospects of government owned corporations developing on a competitive basis in Queensland, then we are throwing out the window all of our advances in micro-economic reform.

The approach that we are seeing under this bill is a very sound one in that it treats the customers, the clients, of this system in a very holistic manner. It puts an emphasis on the rehabilitation of workers who have had accidents, and it is therefore very proactive rather than reactive. It takes the client as a whole and it seeks to ensure one of the most important things that we can seek as a government, and that is to ensure that our workers are sustained in work. There is no replacement for a working person having a viable wage rather than any other arrangement, such as being on workers compensation and living in a debilitated condition for an extended period of time.

It is indeed a sound piece of legislation, and I also commend the minister for bringing within this bill further refinements to the minimum wage provisions under Queensland industrial law. This is a very important principle that has been enshrined in Queensland industrial relations law and practices for a very long time, and I commend the minister for treating this particular provision in this manner. I commend the bill to the House.