



Speech by

Hon. GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Industrial Relations

Hon. G. R. NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.21 a.m.): The federal government's \$60-million royal commission into the building and construction industry in Australia has been little more than an overpriced PR campaign for the woeful industrial relations policies of the Howard government. Let me make it very clear that the Queensland government does not and will not tolerate criminal or unlawful behaviour in the building and construction industry. But neither will we tolerate a new body which seeks to impose its draconian rules and regulations on employees and employers by overriding state industrial laws in every jurisdiction in Australia. Queensland's state legislation, I might add, is far superior to federal industrial laws and has been proven to help better protect our workers.

The federal government is considering the establishment of an Australian building and construction industry commission with the powers to come onto Queensland work sites and run secret investigations. But here is the catch: in the event that any state or territory disagrees with this unwanted imposition of the Commonwealth's unworkable, antiquated, knock-em-down, drag-em-out legislation, then the Howard government will have the power to withdraw any and all federal funding for some of the most vital services in this state. We are talking about projects critical to the Queensland public like schools, roads, hospitals and public housing. And if we think they will not try to do it, we should consider this. We are talking about a federal government that believes that employees who work for a smaller employer should have fewer rights. The federal Industrial Relations Minister, Tony Abbott, is currently attempting to bring in legislation that says the smaller the firm you work for, the fewer rights you should have as a worker. So determined are they that when they failed to get this unfair change through the upper house on eight previous occasions as an industrial relations issue, they are now seeking to change the Corporations Law in order to do it.

An initial analysis of the Cole report shows it is generally complimentary of Queensland regulations and institutional arrangements for workplace health and safety. It even proposes that the Queensland models regarding workplace health and safety should form the basis of any national model. Queensland workers and employers enjoy arguably the best industrial relations systems anywhere in Australia. We have one of the lowest disputation rates in the country, the highest number of workers under state awards, and one of the most powerful commissions in Australia, which the Cole report clearly states is very good in promoting compromise.

The Cole report talks about the need for a cultural change in the building and construction industry. That cultural change will not be brought about by the federal government's big stick approach through this new commission and a complete disregard for industrial laws in Queensland that are proven to work. At last Friday's workplace relations ministerial council meeting in Adelaide, every state and territory put on record their disgust at this misguided inquiry and urged the federal Industrial Relations Minister, Tony Abbott, to make recommendations for a collaborative approach by all jurisdictions, including the federal government, as clearly the only way to bring about the cultural change recommended in the report. I can assure members of the House and the general public that this government will be keeping a close eye on the developments of the Cole recommendations.