



Speech by

**Fiona Simpson**

**MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE**

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## **INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL**

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.36 pm): Let me say at the outset: go Barnaby! I support our new senator and his fight for a fair go for Queensland for which he will fight in the right forum. I found it amusing, however, to hear some state Labor MPs ahead of me on the speaking list who seemed to be more enthusiastic about Barnaby protecting Queenslanders' rights at the federal level than federal Labor. It is a new world!

I am voting against the state government's Industrial Relations Amendment Bill not because I am against workers' rights but because this bill adds nothing to existing rights and opposing it detracts nothing from existing rights. Queensland Premier Peter Beattie says he makes no apology for fast-tracking industrial relations laws through parliament even though these matters are already matters of law in this state. He unashamedly says he is bringing on this debate contrary to the normal rules of the parliament, without the normal 14 days of scrutiny and at considerable cost for an additional sitting day because he wants this month's by-elections in Queensland to serve as a referendum on the Commonwealth's planned industrial relations changes—Commonwealth laws nobody has seen and laws which will not be seen until about October this year.

How cynical of the Premier! What an abuse of people's trust. What an abuse of this parliament and the public purse. What a desperate smokescreen when he is being hammered by the appalling collapse of Queensland's health system. I refuse to play the Premier's games as that would be dishonest. I ask: why is the Beattie government not prepared to go to the by-elections and make them a referendum on the Beattie government's management of the health system, of our road system and asbestos in our schools?

The Beattie Labor government has allowed bullying to flourish in the Public Service, particularly the health department, where a litany of abuse has led to good staff leaving broken and in despair and has also led to patients being left at the mercy of the ad hoc care of a broken health system. I ask: how did the Beattie government look after the rights of these workers? They did not, because the state government was the prime abuser.

I have talked to many Queensland Health workers whose rights would not be protected by this Beattie bill before the House because the abuses that these people have suffered were at the hands of this incompetent state government—a state government which has abused the power of its majority in this parliament, where it holds 70 per cent of the seats. Everywhere I go there are people talking about being sick of the lies told by the Beattie Labor government about the health system and its cover-ups that have literally killed Queenslanders. Is the Beattie government rushing through laws to protect the health of Queenslanders? It is not. In fact, the Beattie government voted down National Party legislation which would have ensured independent auditing of the real hospital waiting lists rather than the Beattie government's shonky figures. One cannot fix the system unless one is honest about the problem. Premier Beattie has not been honest. He has presided over a cover-up.

No, today we are not debating the waiting list figures, which are so shonky that when I tried to get the real documentation for hospital waiting list figures in 1999 under FOI the Premier and his then health minister blocked them from release by taking them to cabinet. Today we are debating an unnecessary bill rather than the fact that the Premier knew about the shonky waiting list figures that his government has

been putting out. He knew about them because he allowed the matter to go to cabinet and he allowed those figures to be blocked from release. Cabinet exemptions from FOI laws are a double-edge sword.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr O'Brien): Order! Member for Maroochydore, speak to the bill before the House, please.

**Miss SIMPSON:** We are here debating a sham industrial relations bill, but the Premier is not putting through laws in this parliament that would protect abused children who are not guaranteed protection. Those children are languishing on other waiting lists. Where are the laws being rushed through by the Beattie government to ensure that there are no more lies about the hidden waiting lists for surgery, which the Premier incredulously denies he knew anything about? This sham IR legislation is being rushed through this parliament not to protect the rights of Queenslanders but to protect a Labor government by providing a smokescreen to cover up its criminal incompetence. Queenslanders have literally died because of the criminal incompetence of the Beattie Labor government.

This bill only repeats the existing industrial rights of Queensland workers; it adds nothing more. The Nationals absolutely support workers' rights, conditions and entitlements. However, we do not support legislation being rushed through parliament in two to three days without any consultation with community and stakeholder groups. The Nationals support a fair industrial relations system which does protect workers' rights and gives people the right to choose whether or not to join a union and the right to secret ballots in the event of industrial action. I support workers having choices, which they do not have under this Labor government. I also support workers being free from bullying by people in power which includes not only workers but also managers in their respective workplaces, starting with the Public Service.

The Nationals can see through this bill as a cynical stunt, and we believe that voters will see through it as well as it is about the Beattie government trying to divert voters' attention in two by-elections. I will judge the federal legislation when I see it and I will decide whether or not I agree with the legislation when I see it. However, I do support the Nationals' amendment that we have tabled. This amendment reinforces our policy, which is about the rights of workers to a mandatory secret ballot in the event of industrial action. If Beattie government members do not support this amendment, why not? If they do not, it will be because they want to support bullies who do not give people the right of private ballots. Yes, how private is it to only have an optional right to a private ballot and not a mandatory right? If only one worker requests a secret ballot and the others do not, how private is the outcome? Not very.

Not having mandatory secret ballots for taking industrial action is a real flaw in the existing law, and that is why we have before us an amendment. Only bullies want to see how people vote and heavy people to toe the line. If government members are so worried about people's voting intentions being different when their ballots are cast secretly as opposed to publicly, then they are just reinforcing the nasty, bullying culture which has created an atmosphere of fear in many workplaces because of inappropriate union power.

I was also a union member before leaving journalism and entering parliament. I believe it is the right of workers to choose whether or not to be a union member and to have the right of privacy in how they vote without the intimidation of having to request to exercise their right of privacy. After all, state, council and federal elections have the right of privacy for voters because when it is optional bullies corrupt the process and the elections are not truly free.

I support the amendment that the Nationals are putting forward in this House. I do not support a smokescreen which is not about protecting workers' rights but about protecting a government that has done nothing to protect the workers who have died on the waiting lists waiting for surgery and has done nothing to protect abused children who are on other hidden waiting lists whose cases have not been appropriately investigated and have not been provided with some protection so that they can be helped to get on with their lives.