



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (3.40 pm): I apologise for my earlier error. It is with great pleasure that I rise to join the debate on industrial relations reforms set down by the federal government, and it is with great pleasure that I look forward to the industrial relations reforms put forward by the federal government. I have always found it funny that the Labor Party calls itself the party of the worker, that it stands up for workers against the employers who oppress them and keep them down. I find it funny because it may very well be true if you are fortunate enough to be actually working under a Labor government.

When Labor's esteemed federal leader, Kim Beazley—I thought I would remind government members of his name because we rarely see him anymore; he is like the invisible man, as oxymoronic as that sounds—was employment minister in the third-most incompetent government Australia has seen in the last 30 years, the Keating government, unemployment was at 10.9 per cent. Before I go on to explain just how significant that is, let me tell members that the Keating administration was third for incompetency behind the Whitlam government and the current Beattie government, in case those opposite were wondering. Unemployment was at 10.9 per cent in December 1992 under the reins of Kim Beazley which at the time meant that around one million Australians were out of work. For a party that says it stands up for the worker, it turns out it is a very exclusive club to be in to be a worker when the mob opposite is in government.

When members look at the industrial relations policy of the Howard government they will see a policy that is fair, that rewards workers and that encourages workers to perform at their best in the workplace. The Australian Labor Party, on the other hand, has an industrial relations policy that is tailor-made to the trade union movement. While I am sure that an industrial relations policy that promoted union hacks to higher, better-paid positions for no benefit to the workers whatsoever is nirvana for the union hacks sitting on backbenches throughout Australia, it is not what is best for the worker and not what is best for Australia.

As I mentioned on Wednesday night, I was very surprised to hear the radio ads for the Labor candidates for Chatsworth and Redcliffe. Blink and you would have missed the candidates' contribution to the advertisement. Instead we had the save-all Premier telling the people of Queensland that the by-elections in Chatsworth and Redcliffe are a referendum on the federal IR reforms. What I have found interesting is some of the other electoral advertising mechanisms that the Labor Party has been using in the Redcliffe by-election. Stunned residents called me today about a sign bearing the name and face of the Labor candidate, Lillian van Litsenburg, that is situated at Deagon racecourse. This is a gross abuse of signage space on government owned lands.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I would appreciate it if the member could confine his remarks to the substantive issues of the bill.

Mr LANGBROEK: Mr Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the contribution of the member for Redlands last night in which he criticised John Howard at great length. Even if the candidate is paying for this signage, the fact that it was not offered to the Liberal candidate is an absolute abuse of power.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Surfers Paradise has already been warned about this. I ask him to confine his remarks strictly to the bill.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Let us indulge his whim and ask the people of Queensland, and at present the people of Chatsworth and Redcliffe, who they trust with the national IR system—the Australian Labor Party and their gophers in Queensland and throughout Australia or the coalition.

As stated, there were one million unemployed Australians during Mr Beazley's time as employment minister. Perhaps it is the Labor Party's policy to stand up for workers' rights, but it is a lot easier to do that when there are only a few workers to do it for. In fact, while the federal Labor government was in power real wages rose only 1.2 per cent. That helped them achieve massive wage rises! On the whole, good work! Keep it up. In fact, the Labor Party's record was so good that in the final financial year of its government there was no real wage increase and, despite claiming to be the worker's friend over the life of the Labor-ACTU accord, real wages declined by five per cent.

Here we have a state government that wants us to go back to a similar situation, a government that is setting us up with a union-laden piece of legislation that would do a similar thing to past union-held pieces of legislation—that is, affect the poorest of our work force in a negative way. This idea of wage growth prevention was boasted by the Labor Party. In fact, the ALP boasted again through its leader Kim Beazley—

We achieved 13 years of wage restraint under the accord. The wage share of GDP came down from 60.1 per cent when we took office to the lowest it had been since 1968. We left office with the wage share of GDP at 55.3 per cent.

This is the federal leader of that party that claims to be the worker's friend, boasting that wages and the wage share of GDP actually dropped under his period in government. But these ideas of keeping wages low for workers is something that is espoused not only at the federal level. At the state level the Premier boasted that employees under state awards are paid less than those under federal awards. I guess that is why the Premier is bringing this legislation in: so that he can keep in the fine tradition of Labor leaders past and present to make sure that workers are either out of work or, if they are in work, to keep their wage rises to an absolute minimum.

It gets worse, though. Not only does the Labor Party feel the need to make people unemployed and to keep their wages down; it is also intent on giving up on the unemployed. In 1994, in Kim Beazley's biography, the federal Labor government passed legislation to abolish the junior wage rate. That is right—abolish it altogether. If it had not been for the worker's friend, the coalition, over 200,000 youth jobs would be in jeopardy.

What about another fact that seems to be overlooked in all of this? While the Labor Party goes on about how it set up the proper schemes and that it is the one that gets it right, under its 13-year reign, between 1983 and 1996, the Labor Party did not even attempt to bring in a national scheme. This is despite the fact that, due to its economic incompetence, Australia was plunged into recession and many workers were denied their wages and entitlements as a result of this. In fact, because the Labor Party was prepared to keep its substandard union regime, 221,000 workers lost \$1.25 billion—that is \$1,250 million.

Again I say that I am surprised that the Premier has wanted to bring this down to a referendum on the issue because, as has been illustrated, the record of the Australia Labor Party at all levels of government has been absolutely shocking when it comes to industrial relations. This would explain why we have not had any facts come out in this campaign against the Howard government. Rather, the Premier has sought to bring on a smear campaign with his union boss mates in his back pocket to try to discredit something that has not even come to the table yet. This is an absolute abuse of the process of this House—using its majority in the House to score political points with this piece of legislation. That is all that it does, because to the extent that this legislation is inconsistent with the federal legislation it is void. Perhaps those members opposite should have a crash course in constitutional law. They may realise that this legislation, or parts of it that do not reflect the federal government's legislation when passed, will be considered void and this amounts to nothing more than a political stunt.

The Beattie government is ramming this bill through the House today with great haste in order to have it out in time for the Chatsworth and Redcliffe by-elections. Let me tell members that it will be a tough ask to have this bill and the flawed, fallacious intentions contained within it override the state of the government. The Premier is seeking a distraction, looking for a way to divert the attention of the electorate to things other than the failing state of our health system, school safety, traffic problems, environmental problems and poor energy delivery. To do so it puts up incorrect facts and says to the people of this fair state that this is what the federal government legislation is doing. This is what is happening, despite the fact that it has not even seen the legislation yet. But when has the Premier ever been tight with the truth or the facts if they get in the way of a good media stunt or a good little photo opportunity?

I said last year that the Premier would make a good profiler because he can tell what people are like just by looking at them. Now he has the ability to see what is in a piece of legislation he has not seen yet,

that no-one has seen yet. He truly is a marvel, isn't he? I urge members to vote this bill down. It is a shocking abuse of process. In this whole process Mr Beattie and the government have shoved the truth aside to play their own political games. I leave the snarling scaremongers on the other side of this House with this piece of wisdom from Sophocles. It is almost a mantra for the way they run government. 'How dreadful the knowledge of the truth can be when there is no help in the truth.' I urge members to vote against this bill.