



Speech by

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Hansard Wednesday, 10 May 2006

WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (9.10 pm): I rise to speak to the Workplace Health and Safety and Other Acts Amendment Bill. I recognise how important workplace health and safety is to us all. I have a large number of mines in my electorate and I understand how important it is for workers to work in a safe environment. The unions in my electorate have been working very well with the companies to ensure that the employees are working in a safe environment.

Back in the 1980s when I was working in Brisbane on the electrification of the rail system, a train came past every five minutes. That was a very difficult situation for the workers, but we always ensured that we would not walk across and onto the other tracks. We also ensured that an employee was looking to see if there were any oncoming trains.

When I went back to Charters Towers I worked in a completely different environment. What was good work practice in Brisbane was completely different for the conditions in Charters Towers. I can recall when I worked in the downs country five trains a day would pass by. I could see a train coming 20 kilometres in the distance each way. The workers were working in 40-degree heat and they were asked to wear an orange vest. At the time the workers protested against wearing these orange vests. It was fine for workers in Brisbane to wear these vests, but it was a completely different situation for those workers in Richmond who were working in 44-degree heat.

In the old days, we would use a nutcracker to pull a plate off. It would take five minutes to zap the plate off and then zap the plate on again. Although I recognise that workplace health and safety is important to all of us, that five-minute job would take an hour and a half. We had to fill out all of these squares, we had to have our work site briefing and a picture was drawn of the railway track. It was absolutely ridiculous. Then we were told that we had to compete against other companies. How can you compete when you have all of these silly impositions put on you? A five-minute job would take an hour and 15 minutes to do. I believe that these issues need to be addressed, because they are absolutely ridiculous.

I would like to mention the work of a union delegate called Les Moffitt. I believe that he has done a great job in fighting the Queensland government against redundancies, the closure of railway stations and not replacing transferred employees. When I started in the railways in 1983, there were 27,000 employees. There were stationmasters on virtually every section of the railway track. There were shunters. They serviced those rural communities.

I can recall when Goss promised that if you voted for him you would never go hungry again. All of these Queensland Rail employees thought that was wonderful—'That will be great. We will vote for Goss because we will never go hungry again.' The Goss government closed down the Albion gang, then it closed down the Caboolture gang, then it closed down the Redbank workshop and then it closed down the Banyo workshop. That workforce has been reduced from 27,000 employees to 12,500. That occurred under a Labor government. I wanted to bring that to the attention of the House.