



Speech by
Ted Malone

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard Tuesday, 22 May 2007

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (4.43 pm): I am thankful for this opportunity to speak to the Industrial Relations and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I will speak briefly in support of the shadow minister's call for an amendment to the legislation as it goes through the House.

The legislation creates the role of an ombudsman and I believe that such a person will play an important role in industrial relations in Queensland. I support the role of the ombudsman in an expanded sense in terms of that person being able to adjudicate in respect to Public Service employees.

In my role as the shadow minister for emergency services, as one would imagine I receive quite a number of calls from paramedics, firemen and other employees of the Department of Emergency Services who are really concerned about their jobs and their lifestyles, which are affected by the way in which they are employed in the Public Service. Unfortunately, when they contact me I would say 90 per cent of them are afraid to leave a name or a number. They usually call late at night, or at times that they find suitable, to raise issues of concern in relation to their employment.

Frankly, the opposition has always held the view—and in the time that I have been the shadow minister in the emergency services portfolio I have put it forward as a policy—that we would introduce an ombudsman or independent commissioner to take on board the concerns of paramedics and other people who work in emergency services, because they are pretty special in terms of their employment and the role that they play in our community. We saw the need for a person who could adjudicate on issues that are of concern regarding their employer, the state government. In realistic ways, the same administrative issues would be found across a number of state government departments.

We foresee that the ombudsman or commissioner would have to have the teeth and the administrative wherewithal to ensure that the issues that are brought before them could be resolved. It is pointless having an ombudsman who does not have the strength or the legislative ability to sought things out. Frankly, previously staff employment issues have been brought before the state government and we have seen them swept under the carpet.

Paramedics, in particular, are affected by these issues. I have been called by people who have been cleared by the CMC of a trumped-up charge but have still had to face disciplinary action by the QAS. They have been demoted or, in other cases, harassed to such an extent that they finally resigned from the department. That is unfortunate. If an ombudsman had been able to take on board the concerns of the paramedics and could have sorted through the issues in a realistic way, possibly those people would still be employed in the service.

There is a real issue here and it behoves the government to listen to our amendment. It provides a real opportunity to make a difference to the employment opportunities and the lifestyle satisfaction of a lot of people who work in the Public Service. I support the legislation in respect of the ombudsman and the expanded role that could possibly result from the amendment moved by the shadow minister. With those few words, I commend the shadow minister's speech and also the amendment moved by the shadow minister.