



Speech by  
**Grace Grace**

**MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL**

Hansard Tuesday, 2 June 2009

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## **INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL**

**Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (6.22 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2009. I draw to the attention of the House that these amendments came about following the report of the review of enterprise bargaining in the Queensland public sector in September 2002. It was determined that there would be some benefit from clarifying the management and administration of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission—the QIRC—including the capacity to establish panels for particular industries. As a result, the Industrial Relations Act 1999 was amended. These amendments revised arrangements for the management and administration of the QIRC, including deleting reference to the commissioner administrator and allowing for the appointment of two deputy presidents. It also placed the responsibility for the administration of the commission and its jurisdiction and powers with the vice-president—and, as one of the previous speakers alluded to, Vice-President Linnane took on those responsibilities—and provided for the vice-president to establish panels for particular industries.

Although that process was considered appropriate at the time, it is now necessary to take the present circumstances into account and make the changes that are proposed in the bill to meet those circumstances. The reality is that the Commonwealth government's Fair Work Act 2009 is to commence on 1 July 2009 and the Commonwealth government is proposing a national industrial relations system to include all states and territories.

As an aside, I find some of the comments made in the House today from those opposite breathtaking. They clearly have no understanding whatsoever of industrial relations. By mixing the federal jurisdiction with the state jurisdiction and mixing whether the Rudd government is going to give certain powers for two presidents to confer clearly demonstrates that they have no idea. They are Work Choices supporters. They will never change and they are here advocating that time and time again. Just like they lost the last federal election because of Work Choices, they are going to continue on this road. You can be sure that they will be on the opposite side of the House for many years to come.

Similar to other states, Queensland has made it clear to the Commonwealth government through the Workplace Relations Ministers Council that if Queensland joins a national system there should be a place for state tribunals in the delivery of services in that system. The members opposite talked about whether the commissions were working together. I know for a fact that already Queensland based QIRC commissioners are taking cases in the federal jurisdiction. Currently, the federal jurisdiction is two commissioners down with the retirement of Commissioner Ken Bacon and I know that only just last week one of the Queensland commissioners was hearing federal jurisdiction matters.

Clearly the members opposite have no idea about how the industrial relations system works. All they are really interested in is stripping workers of their entitlements, which was clearly what they did under Work Choices. That was not done at a time of economic downturn, but at a time of economic boom. When workers really should have been partaking of the benefits of the economy at that time, what did the Howard government do? It stripped them of all of their rights and entitlements and instituted the ability to unfairly dismiss them—harshly dismiss them, unjustly dismiss them, and strip away entitlements to a bare

minimum of five. Yet the members who sit on the other side of the House claim they want to look after the workforce! They are still in this House advocating the benefits of Work Choices and—

**An opposition member** interjected.

**Ms GRACE:** I take that interjection. When unemployment was at its lowest and workers could have benefited, what did the Howard government do? It stripped them of those rights. The members opposite sit there proudly advocating that, even though they lost the federal election quite clearly on that issue. The same old Nationals, the same old Liberal Party.

**Mr Crandon** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Wendt): Order! Member for Coomera, if you wish to interject you must return to your seat.

**Ms GRACE:** The states recognise that state tribunals such as the QIRC are uniquely placed to provide the services that will be required in the national industrial relations system because of their expert local knowledge and experience combined with the efficiencies that they have developed over many years and, as we know, that has already occurred only just last week—that is if the members opposite keep up to date.

This bill transfers the relevant administrative functions that are presently vested in the vice-president through the 2002 legislation to the president. It is really as simple as that. This bill will give the president of the QIRC the ability to participate and cooperate with the president of the Commonwealth industrial tribunal to be called Fair Work Australia, if required, as the president of the Commonwealth industrial tribunal may only discuss interjurisdictional matters and enter into written agreements with the heads of other tribunals. That is the reason for the change.

While positioning the QIRC to take advantage of any opportunities that present themselves in the new order of things, the bill also strengthens the administration of the QIRC by removing any ongoing confusion associated with the president and vice-president having various administrative responsibilities but will not interfere, of course, in the independence of the QIRC. The bill amends the 2002 arrangements to fit the present circumstances and allow the QIRC to work even more effectively with its counterparts elsewhere in the country.

When it comes to consultation, I can guarantee the members on the other side of the House one thing: this government would have consulted much more widely with the stakeholders than Howard ever did when it came to Work Choices. I commend the bill to the House.