



Speech by

Simon Finn

MEMBER FOR YEERONGPILLY

Hansard Tuesday, 2 June 2009

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (7.50 pm): Lead us not into temptation. I rise today to support the amendments to the Industrial Relations Act 1999 and address the provisions of this bill. This bill is a very narrow bill and addresses some very specific terms. Before I go on to that I should make a couple of comments.

Firstly, when speaking to this bill, the member for Gregory lectured us about fairness—about needing to have an independent umpire in order to have fairness. This is coming from the conservative parties who introduced the Australian Fair Pay Commission, which was required to not consider fairness when it made decisions relating to minimum wages, terms and conditions.

Mr Roberts: They took away the SEQEB workers' superannuation. That is the party we are talking about.

Mr FINN: That is right. We have heard talk from a number of members about the modern award, and the previous speaker spoke about the horticultural industry and the growers industry. The modern award in this industry introduces for the first time ever a 38-hour week for workers in this industry. It introduces for the first time penalty rates for workers in this industry who work on Sundays. There are workers in this industry who have worked for 30, 40 or 50 years and who have never been paid penalty rates, unlike their family members, for working on Sundays. They have gone out to work on Sundays and have not had that reward for working through those family times. That is what these people on the opposition side stand up and say is wrong with our system.

This legislation clarifies the role of the president and vice-president of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission and removes ongoing confusion about their respective duties and responsibilities. The amendments in the bill ensure that the head of the state tribunal has the authority needed as the head of an independent umpire to deal with matters of interjurisdictional cooperation and to make arrangements about the utilisation of state tribunals with the head of the Commonwealth industrial tribunal.

The Commonwealth Fair Work Act 2009 commences on 1 July this year. It is wrong for members opposite to say that the Rudd government is not introducing a robust federal industrial system. It is wrong to say that there are not any moves in this country towards an efficient federal industrial system. However, those are not matters that come into this bill.

The member for Burnett, a self-described union member—and I am a proud union member, too—came in here and talked about union officials apparently politicising issues. For him to run that line when the opposition came in here, saw the title of the bill, Industrial Relations Amendment Bill, and ran all of the same old dogma about anti-unionism belies his comments.

In Queensland the head of the QIRC is the president. However, most of the administrative functions of the tribunal are vested in the vice-president. This means that the president of the Commonwealth industrial tribunal does not have the authority to discuss such matters or enter into arrangements with the person in Queensland who is presently responsible for such matters. This bill simply transfers the relevant powers to the president and overcomes the jurisdictional difficulties. The changes will ensure that the

QIRC is ideally placed to take advantage of any national industrial relations system which may emerge from discussions between the Commonwealth government and the states about such a system. I think that the Rudd government is to be commended for its cooperative work with the states and territories to come up with a robust federal industrial system.

I could spend quite a bit of time in this discussion diverting from the provisions of this bill to go through, speaker by speaker, how the description of the industrial system by those opposite was not accurate nor in accordance with any of the directions that industrial relations is taking in this country. However, I shall not divert from the bill to do that.

This bill is about ensuring that cooperation continues at the highest level, that we can facilitate communication lines between the heads of the main industrial relations adjudicators at the state and federal level. The other states and Queensland have made it clear to the Commonwealth government through the Workplace Relations Ministers Council, that if we—and the other states—are to join a national system there needs to be a place for state tribunals in the delivery of services in that system. Contrary to the claims of the opposition, this amendment actually makes the system more efficient. It is about the efficiency of the industrial relations system. The amendments that we are making tonight will assist that efficiency. I commend the bill to the House.