




Speech by
Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (FAIR WORK ACT HARMONISATION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (4.51 pm): I rise to speak on the Industrial Relations (Fair Work Act Harmonisation) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. What a blatantly transparent bill this is, and describing it as fair work harmonisation is deliberately misleading. If anything, this bill is the LNP government's attempt to roll out its version of Work Choices. In essence, this bill seeks to undermine workers' collective bargaining and representation rights and move the industrial relations balance entirely in favour of the employer—in this case, the LNP government. This bill requires the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission to bend to the fiscal strategy of the LNP. Clearly this element corrupts the independence of the tribunal. Under the current act, the tribunal is required to balance the positions of all stakeholders to the matter before it. Part of that consideration has always been an objective analysis of the economic data, and this pointed directly to the capacity to pay. The discretion of the tribunal allowed for such considerations and this process led to more informed, balanced and independent determinations.

This bill seeks to destroy that balance because this LNP government cannot abide by any notion of consultation via collective representation. What makes this worse is the notion of government fiscal strategy and what that vaguely represents and that the material presented to the tribunal by the Under Treasurer cannot be challenged by any of the parties to the hearings. Why bother having these hearings if that is the case? This is simply outrageous! Ultimately, this element of the bill completely unbalances proceedings before the commission in favour of the government. This bill is also corrupted because it represents the employer setting the rules for itself. This LNP government is setting the rules in an entirely prejudicial fashion. This LNP government is legislating unfair advantage to itself. Public sector workers will not wear that and this LNP government will rapidly discover it. This will be even more strongly felt by public sector workers who trusted this LNP government when it was often stated that there was no intention to introduce any changes to the industrial relations space as part of the pre-election platform. Has the LNP not learned anything from the demise of the John Howard regime in exercising absolute power in an area of industrial relations? This LNP government thinks that it has at least two terms to destroy the industrial landscape in this great state. I encourage the LNP to keep rolling out this sort of legislation, because two terms will rapidly become a pipedream. So my advice is for it to bring it on and then sit back and wonder what happened.

Even the introduction of this bill as an urgent bill is nonsense. Has the LNP government bothered to fully and appropriately consult with the likes of teachers, fire and rescue professionals, ambos and nurses—those genuine, front-line, hardworking public sector employees out there busting their gut to deliver services to our communities? Of course there has been no meaningful consultation with those employees because this LNP government does not even understand the notion of good faith consultation. It only appreciates dictate and threat. John Howard learned the lesson that this LNP government is going to have to relearn: do not mislead working people, do not treat them as just another business cost driver, do not treat their representatives as the enemy, do not remove hard-fought conditions and entitlements in a brutal effort to drive productivity and, finally, do not treat them as fools. This bill represents all of that and more.

It is difficult to consider this bill as any more than an unsophisticated attempt to rig the game to the complete advantage of the LNP government. The bill provides a mechanism to completely exclude the notion of collective bargaining at the discretion of this LNP government. Guess what? Even non-union members will not appreciate that component. This bill is all about the government dictating terms and conditions to public sector workers. This LNP government probably thinks that it is a pretty smart way of doing it. Queenslanders are smarter than that and they will rapidly realise what this LNP government represents as far as they and their families are concerned.

This obtuse bill is about weakening the independent umpire, disenfranchising collective bargaining, bringing threat rather than respect into the industrial relations landscape and disrespecting police officers, firies, ambos, park rangers and tradies—all from portfolios I shadow. I have already had many people working in these front-line areas expressing their disgust with the LNP government's portrayal on this matter. John Howard's government was impaled on the spike of Work Choices. This LNP government's inability to resist similar ideological temptation represents an entree to a similar and inevitable conclusion. I, like all reasonable Queenslanders, oppose this bill absolutely.