




Speech by
Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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PUBLIC SERVICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (5.00 pm): This bill is another step in this government's ideological and retrograde agenda to remove the rights of working Queenslanders, the dedicated men and women of the Public Service. It is an attack on workers' rights which deserves to be treated with righteous indignation and outright scorn. First of all I want to focus on the amendments that the Attorney-General has confirmed will be added to this bill. With these disgraceful amendments the government will take away job security provisions for Queensland public servants. It is outrageous and unforgivable to add these amendments at this last minute and not allow time for proper consideration or consultation. What these changes do is allow the government to outsource key government services on a whim. It strips away working conditions negotiated through the Industrial Relations Commission. These amendments will allow the government to sack child safety workers, Legal Aid employees, emergency management and emergency service workers. It even allows for the government to outsource the work of the Electoral Commission. By any measure these are disgraceful changes and if the government cared about Queenslanders—cared about its employees—it would never have been considered. It is all too clear that the government does not care about Queenslanders. Not only is the government making these changes, it is doing it as sneakily as possible. On a Thursday afternoon it is using back door methods to introduce amendments to a bill that is already before this parliament. This is disgusting, a complete insult to Queenslanders and an abuse of this process.

I now turn to the changes to the Industrial Relations Commission concerning legal representation. The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission was designed as a layperson's tribunal and currently many matters are heard without legal representation. This ensures hearings are less combative, less adversarial and less prone to be bogged down by the unnecessary minutiae of legal argument. While legal representation is currently allowed in limited circumstances, this bill significantly expands the scope of when legal representation will be allowed in the commission. These changes mean businesses and the government, with their greater financial means, can hire fancy big-town lawyers to ride roughshod over employees. The truth of the matter is that many employees will be unable to afford legal representation while their employers get the best lawyers money can buy. The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission will be more focused on legal loopholes rather than emphasising fairness and natural justice.

In short, this bill threatens to turn the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission into nothing more than a banquet for fancy big-city lawyers. Of course, this bill is just one more step in the LNP's attack on the Queensland's Public Service, a group of people it continues to deride and insult while conducting mass firings. The government's programs threaten approximately a thousand jobs in my region of Fitzroy based on an analysis of the Queensland Council of Unions. The member for Gregory knows well the potential impact of these job losses and how they can affect our regions. He knows the potential for sackings within the Department of Transport and Main Roads out at Emerald and how sorely they will be felt. Unfortunately, the Premier and his ministers do not seem to understand.

Lastly, I want to return to a familiar refrain: the consultation period on this bill was too short, was needlessly haphazard and, frankly, an insult to public servants. The Public Service and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 was introduced into this House and referred to the Finance and Administration

Committee on 31 July. The call for submissions went out one day later on 1 August. The submissions were due just five days later on 6 August. Let us have a look at that for a minute. The call for submissions went out on a Thursday and the submissions were due on the Monday evening. That left stakeholders with Thursday, Friday and most of Monday to examine the legislation and prepare detailed submissions. I am sure many of the stakeholders worked over the weekend taking time away from their families just to try to provide reasonable and detailed submissions. Less than four working days were allowed for submissions. This is, frankly, a slap in the face to interested public servants and their union representatives.

I want to thank the stakeholder groups who provided submissions to this bill in such a truncated and unacceptable time frame. I appreciate the work of the Queensland Council of Unions, the Queensland Teachers Union, the United Firefighters Union, the Electrical Trades Union and the Queensland Law Society in meeting the government's disturbingly short consultation period. A public hearing was held on 8 August and the report was tabled just five days later on 13 August. I would also like to thank the committee's secretariat for their hard work in meeting this unrealistic and inappropriate time frame foisted on them by the government.

This bill is an assault on workers' rights designed to make it easier for this government to fire public servants. It was designed to help out their lawyer mates at the big end of town. It is unacceptable and I will be opposing it.