



Speech by
Jackie Trad

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard Tuesday, 10 July 2012

SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND WATER (DISTRIBUTION AND RETAIL RESTRUCTURING) AMENDMENT BILL

Ms TRAD (South Brisbane—ALP) (2.50 pm): I rise to speak on the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) Amendment Bill 2012. The Labor Party has always stood up for the rights of Australian workers and it always will. That is why when a piece of legislation is introduced into this House that does nothing but strip away the rights and conditions of workers we will oppose it. That is the specific intent of the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) Amendment Bill 2012. The idea of stripping away the rights and conditions of workers is abhorrent enough, but the way in which this bill achieves this objective perfectly encapsulates the Newman government's attitude to the Public Service specifically and industrial relations generally.

This bill strips away the job security and conditions of the employees of the water entities Queensland Urban Utilities, Unitywater and the former employees of Allconnex. By terminating the 2009 workplace framework and 2012 workplace framework, which were established under the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) Act 2009, the government is stripping away the rights protected by those frameworks. Those rights include protection from forced redundancies, salary maintenance and moving and travel allowances for workers who are forced to travel to new locations of employment which were significantly further away than their workplace of origin. This bill takes away these rights retrospectively and it does so without any consultation at all with employees or their unions—a way of governing that is becoming a hallmark of this LNP, but mostly NP, government.

These workers are providing a front-line service. Water and wastewater services are something that we can easily take for granted. So why is it that the Newman government is treating workers who are providing a front-line service with such disregard? As the opposition leader referred to earlier, one need only look at the Treasurer's comments made earlier this year when he said that the only real jobs are in the private sector. The government does not think these people have real jobs. This is a disgraceful statement coming from someone who has been on the public payroll for over a decade now. Is this why these front-line workers are being treated with such a lack of respect, or is it simply that the LNP do not respect Australian workers full stop?

The report of the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee on this bill was particularly scathing in its assessment of the absence of consultation with workers and unions and the lack of time to consider the bill. It noted—

Unfortunately in this timeframe, it was not possible for the committee to undertake any meaningful consultation or consideration of the policy issues in the Bill. The committee wishes to express the view that, whilst it understands the government's reasons for the prompt passage of this legislation, it considers that realistic consultation times should be adhered to, particularly when legislation affects numerous stakeholders.

The government's own members were critical of the bill and the manner in which it was being rushed through the House without proper consultation. The committee also recognised that the bill was a breach of fundamental legislative principles because of the way it retrospectively stripped away existing rights without consultation or natural justice—another establishing hallmark of this LNP government.

Public hearings on the two bills that I have been involved in now also highlight the fact that this government is short on consultation and large on rhetoric, specifically with respect to the green tape reduction bill and the animal care and protection bill. I share the concerns of the committee members regarding the bill. However, when it comes to the crunch, the government members—even those who are on the committee—will all vote for the bill regardless of their concerns expressed and published in the committee's report. Only the Labor Party can be depended upon to stand up for workers' rights when it really counts. Every one of the members of the government—

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order!

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your protection. Every one of the members of the government will support this stripping away of workers' rights when they vote for this bill. However, it will not be the first time in this parliament that they have voted to take away workers' rights; they have already voted to allow the Attorney-General of all people to terminate industrial action. Many of the members who will vote to take away the rights of workers when they support this bill will be stripping away the rights of their own constituents. I hope they will be able to account for their actions when called to do so. Labor will be opposing this bill because it is another shameless attack on the rights of front-line workers in this state.