




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE**

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## **INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (RESTORING FAIRNESS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (8.13 pm): ‘No public servant needs to fear me.’ These immortal words will continue to haunt the LNP and the Public Service for years as they live vividly in the memories of many front-line workers who were sacked under the Newman government. And this week we learned that this was one of many crucial mistakes made.

Mr Newman also publically announced that he was ‘not a right-wing ideologue’ and respected the role of unions. He continued saying that he had a ‘fantastic’ industrial relations track record at the council, with a low level of industrial disputes. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the attack dogs were set loose and the massive sackings of public servants forced state unemployment figures to skyrocket and cripple the economy in towns and cities like mine, Townsville.

In 2014 the Newman government announced that it would place doctors on individual contracts that would force our most senior specialists out of the public health system. The contracts would have stripped away vital working conditions, like fatigue management, and attacked job security, putting the needs of health bureaucrats ahead of those of the Queensland public and the doctors.

I cite the *Brisbane Times*. Speaking on behalf of the doctors, Christa Bell and David Spain said that every public ED specialist at Townsville, Cairns, Robina and the Gold Coast University Hospital had pledged to leave rather than sign the individual contracts. ‘The message from the government is that they’re actually wanting us to resign by not giving us a fair contract,’ Dr Spain said. Dr Bell said that the government was using public hospital doctors and patients to push an ideological industrial agenda. ‘I want to just go back to work, see patients, do my job and for this to be over,’ she said.

During a question time session in parliament dominated by the doctor employment contract issue at the time, then premier Campbell Newman said that the government was prepared to recruit ‘interstate or overseas’ doctors to replace Queensland doctors who chose to resign. He later went on to say, ‘Do not doubt the government’s resolve. Do not doubt that we will see this thing through.’

The year 1985 introduced a DeLorean car to audiences as it flashed across the big screen in the shape of a time machine that took participants ‘back to the future’. Jump on board the DeLorean because we are going back to the future and it is 1985. The National Party government of Joh Bjelke-Petersen sacked 1,100 electricity workers—all members of the ETU, all employed by SEQEB. Its aim was to privatise the industry. Bjelke-Petersen’s goal was to take away from the power workers job security, erode their conditions and increase the length of their working week. The workers resisted. It is sounding a little familiar, isn’t it?

On 6 February that same year, systems control, overhead linesmen, underground cable jinkers and trades assistants withdrew their labour. On 7 February, Bjelke-Petersen declared a state of emergency under the State Transport Act 1938 and sacked the striking workers. This action saw the power station operators cut supply in support of the dismissed men. Bjelke-Petersen responded by

giving his corrupt police commissioner at the time, Terry Lewis—we all remember him—‘concise, clear directions’ for the breaking of picket lines and the gathering of evidence of any threats made against ETU members wanting to scab.

The dispute could have been settled without the loss of any jobs had Bjelke-Petersen not vetoed a possible solution that would have been acceptable to the Queensland Industrial Commission, but then premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen said he wanted the striking workers, members of the ETU, to ‘suffer enormously’. The Bjelke-Petersen government tore up the industrial relations rule book and rammed savage anti-union legislation through parliament—this very House.

The Electricity (Continuity of Supply) Bill forbade strikes and picketing of electricity workers and made provision for confiscation of their property, including their homes, if they went on strike. The bill barred union officials from entering workplaces and made provision for the rapid deregistration of unions and seizure of their funds—all this because men and women wanted to protect their job security.

I used the analogy of the film *Back to the Future* because that is just what the Newman government wanted to do—take Queensland back to the future. In Campbell Newman’s maiden speech to parliament he praised Bjelke-Petersen’s ‘many achievements’ and announced his intention to ‘live up to the standards of my eminent predecessors’. True to his word, the former premier quickly began a relentless drive to attack unions and workers’ rights.

I recently met with a number of members of the Together union who said to me that they just wanted their employer to hear that they wanted job security. They, like the doctors, wanted to do a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay and know that they could turn up to work the next day ready to do it all again. That is why I commend the bill to the House.