




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (10.05 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Industrial Relations (Restoring Fairness) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. It was during the past industrial relations changes that we saw a range of employment conditions removed, leaving our public sector workers unable to negotiate on specific terms and conditions. This affected hundreds of thousands of jobs across the state. Workers have been denied many rights, such as locality allowances and job security, and they were unable to speak about many matters of concern to them. These are all significant issues for those who live in the electorate of Dalrymple.

Since then I have heard from many public sector workers, specifically council workers, who are concerned about the changes. Some agreements under the conditions, though certified, have been labelled unfair due to the list of non-negotiables. The ability to bargain all aspects of workplace agreements is a right I am happy to help restore. I believe the introduction of the bill will increase job security. Certainty for workers and their families is vital for the continuation of small country towns as confidence in the workplace flows on economically through local communities.

In supporting this bill, I believe this is very important, and I will use a council worker as an example. Many council workers have come to me expressing great concern over Newman's harmonisation legislation and having to negotiate under those agreements. Council workers work their guts out all their lives—they are up there amongst the flies, the crows, the heat and the dust, out in many different country towns living in dongas and caravans. By the time they retire, they have just paid off their house and possibly their car and they have a few dollars to spend. Under the Newman legislation, the nine-day fortnight and the locality allowance were taken away. They are important things. The previous speaker mentioned losing \$1,000 a year, and those council workers probably lost \$600 but that money was everything to them because they were not on much money to start with. To take these conditions off them is a low act because of the way these people live.

Many CEOs have said that the sky was going to fall in with regard to the councils. They said it was going to cost them hundreds of thousands of dollars, but do you know that those hundreds of thousands of dollars are coming out of the workers' pay packets that they said they were going to save? It is all right for the CEO who is on \$160,000 or \$180,000 a year, but for that working-class person on \$45,000 or \$50,000 a year, a nine-day fortnight is everything to them because they go out west, they work, they come back and they have three days with their family. That is important to them—the locality allowance, the right to bargain and all of these things.

Likewise, we want to ensure that the economy is doing well. When the Newman government sacked 16,000 employees there was a lack of confidence out there. That was a great stunt: they thought that, when they went to the next election, everyone would have forgotten about it. It was also a low act when they promised during the election campaign that they would be public servant friendly. It was the lowest lying act we have ever seen to hear someone promise, 'We will look after you. We

will care for you. Vote for us and, likewise, there will be no asset sales.' We saw a low, lying act. That is the way that I see it.

Mr ELMES: I rise to a point of order.

Mr KNUTH: I withdraw, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr ELMES: The member has used the word 'lying' twice.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! Thank you, the member for Dalrymple has withdrawn and he has the call.

Mr KNUTH: Business has suffered because the person who was about to spend money to buy a house all of a sudden did not have a job. So he did not buy a house. Then the builder did not have a job to build. His workers also did not have a job because the builder did not have a house to build. Then his mate the public servant, who did have a job, was so insecure about his job that he did not buy his new car. He did not spend because he was concerned about his job security. This filtered right throughout the state. The ripple effects of sacking those 16,000 employees are still being felt today, including in rural and regional Queensland. We are suffering very, very badly. The member for Mount Isa and I went out to Hughenden because of job cutbacks. I cannot recall, but I believe there was going to be 75 in the region. That hall filled with people and half of them were businesspeople.

Mr Katter interjected.

Mr KNUTH: It was more than half who were businesspeople because they relied on those railway jobs in order to survive. When they closed down the railway station in Charters Towers, 37 workers—and families—lost their job. Many left town. Small business there will tell honourable members right now that they felt the impacts of that a month after those jobs were gone. It is so important to look after the working-class people.

Another example is the railway station closures out in midwest Queensland, and I have mentioned this before. I used to work out there. I remember small country towns such as Nelia, Nonda, Maxwellton and Torrens Creek, all thriving little communities with a station master and a shunter. Pentland is another one. The train would pull up, the truck driver would pick up the goods. Those children at that station would go to the school. Because of that, the teachers were employed. One railway station was closed down and the school closed down, the little butcher's shop closed down, the truckie does not have a job and that is it; that is the end of those country towns.

That is why when the councils come out and say that the sky is falling I believe they are totally misleading people. The Local Government Association, likewise, have been misleading people. When we tie in these factors it is clear that we have to look after the working-class people; they are the backbone of this country. They work, they pay their taxes, they are generous, they buy raffle tickets and they contribute to our society. I am very pleased that this bill is coming in to restore those rights to those workers so they can contribute and play their part. We saw what happened when those rights were taken away. We almost saw a recession in this state. I commend this bill to the House.