




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Mining Industry, Labour Hire

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (12.31 pm): In the past year in Queensland, four coalminers died—the highest death toll in 20 years. Three weeks ago there was another death. A 55-year-old worker died after a fatal accident at the Newlands coalmine. Safety at work is one of the most critical issues that anybody will face. The ramifications of workplace deaths impact not only the family but also the whole community.

I have to question the multinational coalmining companies risking the safety of their workers for the sake of the big buck. The vested interest of the mining companies to use labour hire companies reveals that there is no respect or regard for the employees, their families or the community. It is evident that the mining companies have no intention of resolving the serious issue of the casualisation of the workforce through the use of labour hire companies. I condemn the actions of the labour hire companies and their draconian approach to their employees, families and communities.

The people I have spoken to all want the same thing: to know that when they turn up to work they will have a job, they will be safe and they will go home to their families at the end of their shift. They want to know that the contract they signed yesterday will still be valid today. They want to rent or buy a house without the fear that they will not be able to make the rent or mortgage payments next week or that they will not be forced into breaking their leases so that they can look for employment in a new town. They want to feed and educate their children and not have to relocate at the whim of a mining or labour hire company that has no compassion or sympathy. Madam Deputy Speaker, they are not asking for any more than you or I would.

There are many stories, many of them untold, about the treatment of employees by labour hire companies on mine sites. There is no compassion, no consideration for families or their long-term plans, because there is no job security. It is evident that labour hire company employees are being exploited, especially when it comes to wages. We have been informed that some shifts have dropped from 12 hours to eight, translating to a pay cut of \$36,000 a year. Labour hire staff are receiving less and less pay, with some suffering a drop from \$70 per hour to \$36 per hour.

We have heard heartbreaking stories about the personal impact on exploited workers. One woman, a casual employee of a labour hire company, asked to have time off to attend her father's funeral. To her disbelief, the labour hire company informed her that she had only one day to attend the funeral and one day to travel the 2,000-kilometre round trip. That mine worker has years of experience, but under those devastating circumstances she had no choice but to quit her job, lay off the nanny who took care of her children while she was at work and break the lease on her home. The woman is currently not working as she fears that if she takes another job with a mining labour company she could lose it with an hour's notice and have to uproot her family again.

Another female employee spoke of her fear of reporting incidents. She said that labour hire staff are treated worse and work in environments that are unsafe because they fear that reporting safety incidents could mean that they will lose their jobs for causing trouble. I have been advised that the labour hire employees are powerless to protect themselves and they plead with permanent employers to report safety issues.

A man standing on a picket line at Middlemount told me that they had been on strike for 25 days. They are only asking for something simple: fair employment contracts, the right to job security and for the mining companies to stop shifting the goalposts and twisting policy to suit their own profit driven agendas. In the past, governments have set strong conditions on mining companies and reminded them that the resources belonged to Queensland. If they did mine the resources, it was on condition that they keep the workforce safe, build homes, bring in families and create robust communities.

The only real action successive governments have taken is the Inquiry into the practices of the labour hire industry in Queensland. Disappointingly, it made only one recommendation, that the minister progress the issue through COAG meetings. That is just not good enough. I call on the state government to do something, stop talking and take action.