




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

Record of Proceedings, 7 September 2017

LABOUR HIRE LICENSING BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (3.33 pm): I rise to speak on the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. The policy objectives of the bill are to protect labour hire workers from exploitation and restore confidence in the labour hire industry through the regulation of providers of labour hire services in Queensland. The bill establishes a mandatory business licensing scheme for the labour hire industry in Queensland, which is fair enough. It will require labour hire providers to be licensed, which is fair enough. It will require persons who engage labour hire providers to only engage a licensed labour hire provider, which is fair enough. We would all have to support that. It will require a labour hire licensee to satisfy a fit-and-proper-person test to establish that they are capable of providing labour hire services in compliance with all the relevant laws and that the business is financially viable. We would all have to agree with that, too. I cannot see how anyone could argue with that. It will require licence holders to report regularly. It will provide strong penalties for breaches of obligations and will provide an awareness, monitoring and enforcement function through a compliance unit, which is pretty reasonable. I cannot see how anyone could not support that, particularly as this is about stamping out unscrupulous ruthless labour hire companies.

In the past 18 months in Queensland, five coalminers have died. That is the highest death toll in 20 years. Three weeks ago, a mineworker died after an accident at Goonyella Riverside coal mine. Safety at work is one of the most critical issues that anyone will ever face. The ramifications of workplace deaths impact not only the families but also the whole community. Michael Garrels has spent five years seeking justice and helping families impacted by workplace deaths, after losing his son who was electrocuted at a construction site at Clermont. In the past two sitting weeks, legislative changes were passed in this House to protect the safety of workers in the workplace. Had that legislation been passed six years ago, Michael's son would be alive today. That is why I support this legislation. I support it because it is about protecting the safety of workers, protecting workers' rights, and protecting their wages and conditions.

Protecting the vested interests of, in particular, the coalmining companies to use unregulated, unscrupulous labour hire companies reveals that there is no respect or regard for employees, their families or communities. I condemn the actions of the labour hire companies and their draconian approach to employees, families and communities. All that the people I have spoken to want is the same thing—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr KNUTH: Those fellows voted for a massive pay rise. Campbell Newman's was \$70,000 and they all gave him a standing ovation. However, when it comes to a labour hire worker, there is no way they will do anything but back the ruthless—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Crawford): Order! The House will come to order.

Mr KNUTH: All the people I have spoken to want the same thing, that is, to know that when they turn up to work they will have a job, they will be safe and they will go home to be with their families at the end of the shift. Is that too much to ask? It seems to be very painful for the LNP. They believe, 'This can't happen. We can't have them come home. We can't have them well paid. We must look after the big corporations.' Workers 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; that they will not be forced into breaking a lease so that they can look for employment in another town. They want to feed and educate their children and not have to relocate them at the whim of a mining or labour hire company that has no compassion or sympathy. They are not asking for any more than you or I would. The labour hire companies treat the workers like cannon fodder.

Last night we heard the member for Kawana speak. It was a painful speech. I know that all his own members were crying out for mercy, wanting him to stop. When he was the minister, they were all closing their eyes and crying, 'Please, get rid of this bloke.' Some of them wanted to lose their seats because they were in that much pain from listening to the member. Still, the LNP do not know what they stand for. Last night, they said that they were for the farmers. We know that they stand for one thing, which is the big multinational corporations and the ruthless labour hire companies. They back them, but what else? They said, 'We care for the farmers.' They introduced the Mineral and Energy Resources (Common Provisions) Bill that trampled the rights of landowners. Landowners marched against the actions of the LNP. Did they do anything about ethanol? They introduced three private member's bills calling on the Labor government to do something. What happened—

Mr BLEIJIE: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance as to where ethanol is in this bill or in the long title of the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Kawana, you beat me by about 30 seconds.

Mr KNUTH: You had your say—45 or 50 minutes of it last night.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Dalrymple, I will ask you to bring your comments back to the bill.

Mr KNUTH: There are many untold stories about the treatment of employees on mine sites by labour hire companies. There is no compassion or consideration for their families. They cannot make long-term plans because there is no job security. We are constantly being informed that these companies cut shifts without notice from 12 hours to eight hours, translating to a pay cut of \$36,000 a year. Labour hire staff will be on \$70 an hour one day and \$36 an hour the next day. The LNP cheer them on: 'It is great that we dropped workers' rates from \$76 an hour to \$36 an hour. That is good business. It is really great to hear that the labour hire companies are making big profits.' What is happening to the workers? They are losing their homes and they are leaving their communities. They are left with nothing and the LNP cheers this on.

The LNP say that they are the workers' friend. They are the farmers' friend, they say. They marched with the dairy farmers and said, 'We care for you. We are with you.' I introduced a bill to support the dairy industry and they opposed it. Then Labor gave a million dollars to help the dairy farmers. We introduced a bill and Labor gave a million dollars, but what did the LNP give them? They gave them a hot iron—nothing.

When Campbell Newman stood up in this place and made the announcement that he was going to give himself a \$70,000 pay rise, what did the LNP do? They cheered him on and gave him a standing ovation.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr KNUTH: You were there. You cheered him on. There are about 35 fewer LNP members now, but probably about 25 wanted to leave because of the pain they were going through listening to the member for Kawana. They gave Campbell Newman a standing ovation for the \$70,000 pay rise and the next day they cut pensioner lawn mowing vouchers.

One woman who is 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 told her that she had only two days to attend the funeral—a 2,000 kilometre round trip. That mine worker has years of experience, but under those devastating circumstances she had no other choice but to move her children and family to another place to find another job, all because she wanted a couple of days off to attend her father's funeral.

There are many other stories like this. Another female employee spoke of her fear of reporting incidents. She said that labour hire staff are treated worse than other staff. They are working in environments that are unsafe for fear that reporting safety incidents could mean that they will lose their jobs for causing trouble. I have also been advised that there are labour hire employees who are powerless to protect themselves and plead with the permanent employees to report safety issues.

What did the LNP do? They gave themselves a pay rise, built the Taj Mahal, sacked 16,000 employees, cut the pensioner lawn mowing vouchers, backed the multinational mining companies and labour hire companies and then said that they are good for Queensland and vote for them. They spent a million dollars trying to get rid of me from my seat because they wanted a party hack who would say yes and do what they are told. I commend this bill to the House.