




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

Record of Proceedings, 17 May 2018

MOTION

Referral to Education and Small Business Committee

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (5.21 pm): I support the Premier's motion in relation to the wage theft inquiry. This is a referral to a parliamentary committee. We are not debating legislative change. It is simply a referral to a committee. There are going to be months of submissions and months of evidence gathering in relation to this issue. Unless those opposite have been hiding under a rock, there has been outstanding evidence nationally in relation to the wage theft of ordinary workers.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms GRACE: I will take that interjection. We want to know what is happening in Queensland. It is happening nationally with 7-Eleven and others.

Mr Minnikin interjected.

Ms GRACE: The ones that you sacked. The nurses that were sacked by the Newman government.

This is a referral with regard to wage theft. It is not a fishing expedition, as it was put by the member for Toowoomba South. It is not a case of all of a sudden believing the crocodile tears of those opposite that they are concerned about the union movement and how they view workers. It is not about the use of labour hire—legislation which is now enacted, but which they opposed. Labour hire people are being registered and licensed in this state. We know who they are and where they are working. They are doing the right thing by the workers. This is just muddying the waters and rewriting history.

When it comes to industrial relations the member for Kawana knows about as much about industrial relations as a two-year-old attending preschool would. Let us not rewrite history. When the Corporations Act was used by the Howard government for the first time in Australia to regulate industrial relations, over 98 per cent of Queensland's private industrial relations system went to the Commonwealth. To suggest that we were going to hold a separate industrial relations system for fewer than two per cent of workers in this state is ludicrous. All they are doing is playing politics. Employers wanted that to occur as well.

The majority of workers are under the Corporations Law covered by the federal system. We referred a minimal number of workers because at that time it would have been ridiculous to keep them in a separate system. That was a hostile takeover by the Howard government.

If those opposite believed that we should have maintained them in the state system, why did the member for Kawana not take them back when they were in government? Why did he not bring them back into the state system if he was so concerned that they were given to the federal system? He does not believe it. It is a political stunt. He comes in talking about that when they had no intention of ever doing it. Do not come in here with crocodile tears when talking about referring that small percentage of the workforce to the Commonwealth after a hostile takeover of IR.

What I say is exactly the case, not the spin and political angle put on it by the member for Kawana. When it comes to wage theft, I point out, in case those opposite have been hiding under a rock, that there has been evidence after evidence of employees who have been underpaid or not paid. There have almost been business cases built around not paying workers their proper wages. Workers in Queensland are being impacted by that.

Not a day goes by in my office where workers are not writing to us about the underpayment of wages and their industrial conditions. We have to refer them to the federal jurisdiction in order for them to get some sort of remedy in relation to what has been going on for them. It is becoming a national disgrace. We want to know how Queensland workers are being impacted by this.

If the federal system under this Turnbull government is not making sure workers are being paid then we as a state need evidence and have to suggest what needs to be done to remedy the situation. As I said this morning, I notice more money is being given for the registration of industrial organisations. I know extra money is being given to the ABCC. There is overwhelming evidence that 7-Eleven, Domino's, Pizza Hut and recently huge multinationals like Caltex have business cases where they have been underpaying workers. It is a way they balance these shops against their petrol stations. Big multinationals are ripping workers off. Backpackers are not being paid.

We have had the first employer in this state sent to prison for not paying what the Fair Work Commission said needed to be back paid. A tourism operator in Cairns did not abide by the orders to back pay workers. That is what is occurring. If they do not have the power to do it then we need to find out exactly what is happening.

A parliamentary inquiry is the best way to do that. They have broad terms of reference. It is about what models are being used. How many workers are coming forward about the use of ABNs? I use the example of my daughter. Young people who have no intention of operating a business, do not have a permanent address and have just left university are being provide an ABN to get a job. This has to stop. There are not only implications in the industrial relations system but also implications in the taxation system. There is unpaid superannuation and unpaid income tax. All of those issues are affecting Queensland workers every day. I support the Premier's motion 100 per cent.

The amendment moved by the member for Kawana is just crocodile tears and filibustering. They are using what is a very important issue as a political football. We will not allow those opposite to use workers as a political football in this House.

Wage theft is a real situation. There are a number of examples where it is occurring. We want the opportunity for workers to come forward to a parliamentary committee, made up of members from both sides. We want the committee to hear evidence throughout Queensland and find out what is happening. We know that when one pays workers properly and they get their entitlements they are better workers. We know that that is the case. If the federal legislation is not keeping pace and does not have the ability to enforce this in this state then we are going to make it an issue. As the industrial relations minister, I will not stop advocating on behalf of those workers who are not paid correctly.

I will not be supporting the politically motivated amendments by the member for Kawana. They have nothing to do with wage theft. I support the motion moved by the Premier and I urge all in this House to do likewise. Let us give workers the ability to come to a bipartisan parliamentary committee to put their case. Let us find out what is happening in Queensland. Let us go forward and protect those workers as best we can in this state. That is what this side stands for. I support the motion from the Premier.

Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have not finished yet. I move that the question be put—

Opposition members interjected.

Ms GRACE: No, my time had not expired.

Mr Hart interjected.

Ms GRACE: I did not sit down.

Mrs Frecklington: You turned your microphone off.

Ms GRACE: I did not sit down and I still had time on the clock.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I will take advice from the Clerk.

Mr BLEIJIE: I rise to a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Whether the minister sat down or not, as Deputy Speaker you had given the call to the member for Burleigh.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Kawana, I said that I would take advice from the Clerk. Member for McConnel, you were still on your feet so I would like you to proceed please.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think I was having a drink at the time. I knew I had two minutes left on the clock.

Opposition members interjected.

Ms GRACE: No, I did not. That is not true.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Clerk has advised of the rule.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I move—

That the question be now put.