



DAVID MORRIS MP

Member for Mornington
Shadow Minister for Finance

Fair Work Changes – Bad Public Policy and Bad Legislation

Legislative Assembly 23 February 2017

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — This is a bill with only one purpose, and that purpose is to lock successive governments into the Premier's profligate public sector wages policy, to lock them in for government after government after government.

The sad thing is if only members opposite could realise that if they actually stick up for the public interest and for ordinary Victorians, instead of their mates, those people who they owe a debt to for getting them onto the Treasury bench, then they might actually get returned next time.

But no, they are not interested in doing that. They are interested in looking after their union mates, and they are hoping the public will not notice.

But fortunately they will.

It is clear from the debate today's debate that government members know that they are not standing up for the community. They know they are doing the wrong thing. They know that their mates, the Premier's mates, will be the winners from this legislation. They know that the public interest and ordinary Victorians will be the losers.

If you look at the types of agreements that have been negotiated by this government, the sorts of things that have been put into them, it is little wonder that the public simply does not trust them in this regard. We have seen 19 per cent increases on all allowances for the Country Fire Authority (CFA), delayed pay increases, \$5000 in expenses because of court and tribunal proceedings, sports vouchers, allowances for those who live outside "difficult to fill" areas.

When the question was asked in the outcomes hearings, the relevant individual had to ask, 'What is a difficult to fill area?'. There have been awareness programs with further loadings; road accident rescues, further loadings; extra significant amounts for having to travel a modest distance; plus of course the killer, a qualified firefighter rate for communications controllers, 34 per cent bonus

That is the type of agreement we are seeing negotiated by this government. We need look no further than what has happened as a consequence to public sector wage costs to see the impact of this.

In 2014–15 the public sector wage costs were \$18-and-a-bit billion. In the 2016–17 budget they had shot up by 15.2 per cent to \$21.3 billion, and they are expected to reach \$23.7 billion by 2019–20. Yet when the mid-year budget review was released, there was a \$1.2 billion hit on wage costs in just seven months.

You cannot sustain that for a couple of years, let alone over a number of governments. It simply does not work.

Apparently this government has not learned its lesson. It has not learned that an enterprise agreement has to cut both ways. You have got to have benefits for the employees, but you have also got to have productivity gains. It is not a one-sided process, and unfortunately the sorts of deals that have been negotiated — each and every one of the deals that has been negotiated under this government — have been extremely one-sided. It has been all about one side to the exclusion of the public interest, in every case.

It is clear some members of the government do not like these grubby deals. They will not talk about the bill. They will not talk about the fact — —

Ms Hutchins — We put out a press release!

Mr MORRIS — I am not talking about your press releases, I am talking about this debate, because there has been from the government benches almost no mention of the bill. There was a ruling earlier, which I will not refer to because it might be construed as maligning the Chair, which allowed further matters, extraneous matters, to continue to be raised, because the substance of this bill is anathema to most government members.

In fact there has been no legitimate effort or legitimate attempt to justify this corrupt public rip-off.

All we have heard in this debate is about penalty rates, which are entirely irrelevant to this discussion. All we have heard are the words of class warfare, and there is no place for class warfare or for this sort of ideology in the state. All we have heard in this debate is about how members on this side are supposedly union-haters, and that is an outright lie.

But that is typical of the Premier, it is typical of the government he leads, and it is typical of the backbench rabble that he commands, sitting over there. They are not prepared to stand up for the public interest. They are not prepared to even try to justify this appalling piece of legislation.

The coalition understands that this was an ALP election commitment, but we also understand that if this bill is passed, the types of provisions that the

Premier has agreed with Peter Marshall, the types of provisions that allow United Firefighters Union (UFU) style restrictions, UFU style restrictive practices and UFU style controls, the sorts of agreements that have delivered those things to the CFA will be open slather across the public sector.

I contrast that view and I contrast the measures contained in this bill with the provisions that were in the bill — now the principal act — introduced by Labor under John Brumby in 2009.

In 2009 the Labor Party understood that governments were elected to govern. In 2009 they understood that management should be allowed to appropriately manage the organisations they are there to run and they are paid to run.

In 2009 the Labor Party understood that genuine productivity gains could be negotiated and could be implemented with the workforce. But this government simply does not understand those basic facts. Those things are all in the principal act, and they are all things that are being removed by this bill, because under this bill productivity goes out the window.

They have put the foxes in charge of the henhouse.

Seriously, what union leader worth their salt would agree to a cut in numbers, no matter how great the productivity gain, no matter how beneficial to the organisation, no matter the dividend to the community as a whole? They simply would not, because it would lower their membership.

Once staffing numbers are included in enterprise agreements the genie is out of the bottle, absolutely.

I conclude by reiterating a point that has been made by a number of coalition speakers today, and that is to make it explicitly clear that no matter how distasteful we might find any agreement negotiated by this Labor government, unlike the Premier, we are not in the business of tearing up signed agreements, tearing up signed contracts.

We not in the business of setting aside bona fide agreements. Let us not have any scare campaigns on this score.

Let us not have these Labor backbenchers running out to their communities and telling lies about the intentions of the opposition.

This is bad public policy, it is bad legislation, and it should not pass the Parliament.