

DISPUTE BETWEEN UNITED KG AND MAINTENANCE WORKERS, THREAT TO WESTERN POWER
SUPPLIES

503. Mrs C.L. EDWARDES to the Minister for Energy:

I refer the minister to the ongoing dispute at Muja power station between contractor United KG and the maintenance workers. Given that the dispute has the potential to threaten Western Australia's power supplies, can the minister explain what steps the Government has taken to resolve the dispute and why the minister has not stepped in to resolve the dispute in the interest of all Western Australians?

Mr E.S. RIPPER replied:

This is an extremely serious issue. Western Power's generation units at Muja need to be maintained to be available to meet peak power demand in the summer period. The dispute is not between Western Power and its work force. Industrial relations in Western Power have been very calm and satisfactory ever since the Labor Government was elected in 2001. The dispute is between a private sector employer and its employees. The dispute has been conducted under federal industrial relations laws and is subject to the authority of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: So you do not do anything.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The member for Kingsley has spoken rather too soon. Of course the Government has been doing everything possible to get the protagonists to talk to each other and resolve this very serious matter. I organised meetings between the union and the company, which occurred in the boardroom of Western Power. Negotiations took place for seven-and-a-half hours. While I was on leave, the Acting Minister for Energy, my colleague the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection, met with the union and the contractor.

The SPEAKER: Order, minister! I warn the minister about the sub judice rules. I believe this matter is before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. I do not know whether the information the minister is now imparting breaches those rules. I warn the minister to that extent.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I would be very surprised if the information that the Government had encouraged the protagonists of an industrial dispute to meet was in contempt of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. As Minister for Energy and the Acting Minister for Energy, my colleague the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection and I have taken a direct role in encouraging the contractor and employees to speak to each other. We have made it clear to the contractor and the union that the maintenance work is a serious issue. Western Power is not joking when it explains to the Industrial Relations Commission just how serious this issue is. The Government has worked with Western Power, the contractor and the union to get an expeditious resolution to the dispute.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: How long will you allow the dispute to go on?

Mr E.S. RIPPER: If the member for Kingsley thinks that the Government should step in and throw a bucket of money at the issue or invoke a law that she has not specified, she should say so.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: Are those all the options you have looked at?

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Government has done everything possible to encourage a resolution to the dispute and to encourage the Australian Industrial Relations Commission to use the full powers at its disposal.