

INTERIM NATIONAL BUILDING INDUSTRY TASK FORCE

58. Mrs C.L. EDWARDES to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection:

- (1) Is the minister aware of criticism by the Western Australia Police Service, industry and other parties in evidence given before the Cole royal commission of the Building Industry and Special Projects Inspectorate to the effect that it lacks proper powers and was not proactive in resolving problems on building sites?
- (2) Will the minister give full support to the interim national building industry task force to be established following the recommendation of the Cole royal commission to assist employers in having action taken against unions that are abusing their power on work sites, given that little or no assistance is currently being received from the Building Industry and Special Projects Inspectorate?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

- (1)-(2) The question could be taken in two parts: one relating to evidence given before the Cole royal commission and the other relating to the announcement by Minister Abbott yesterday on setting up a federal task force.

With regard to the police evidence given before the Cole royal commission, I am not sure exactly to which part of that the member is alluding. However, there was clearly a statement made that was critical of BISPI. It was hard to fathom, because the Police Service had been asked to set up protocols and a memorandum of understanding establishing how BISPI would operate, and for some months there had been no suggestion that the Police Service was not happy with it. It would appear that the point of view put by at least some police officers was coloured by a lack of understanding of what the task force had done in the past. A range of other evidence that has emerged through the royal commission alluded to problems that occurred when the previous task force was in place. To forget the failings of the last task force and to say that, because there are problems BISPI is - on a comparative basis - not performing, is not a well-founded point of view. However, it was the point of view put to the royal commission.

The second part of the question related to Minister Abbott's suggestion to set up a federal task force. I have nothing other than the press release and I will wait to hear the minister's comments on that. I have previous experience with Minister Abbott, when he put out a press release relating to the scheme that the federal Government put in place to fix up entitlements for workers when companies went bankrupt. This happened after the company belonging to the Prime Minister's brother went under. Suddenly, if a person happened to work for the Prime Minister's brother, he got 100c in the dollar. Everyone else got next to nothing. The pressure was on the federal Government and a new scheme called the general employee entitlements and redundancy scheme, or GEERS, emerged and we were told that things were going to be better. This related to the collapse of Ansett Australia and the need to address the related problems. A few days later I was in a ministerial conference with Minister Abbott and quizzed him at some length about the technical details of this new offer. He could not answer because all he had was a press release.

I am not sure whether this latest press release has any substance to it or whether it is another "Abbott press release". I will wait until we get the substance from the minister before I make any comment on his current proposal to put in place a national task force.