

WORKSAFE, WORK SAFETY ISSUES

1012. Mrs C.L. EDWARDES to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection:

I refer the minister to an article in *The Australian Financial Review* of 25 August regarding the Construction, Forestry, Mining, and Energy Union's targeting of safety issues on building sites which reads -

WorkSafe WA has also issued Hanssen 24 warning notices, . . .

A WorkSafe WA spokesman said Hanssen was no better or no worse than many other builders in Perth and one of the reasons so many notices had been issued was because Hanssen was being targeted by the CFMEU.

- (1) Does the minister concede that WorkSafe is showing unfair bias in issuing an unusually high number of warning notices to a particular builder simply because he has been targeted by the CFMEU, when safety issues require similar scrutiny among other builders who have not been subject to the same pressure?
- (2) What is the minister doing to ensure that WorkSafe is treating safety issues fairly, consistently and seriously and to ensure that WorkSafe processes are not being used to pursue a private agenda, which has nothing to do with work safety, against a particular company?
- (3) Given that union membership for the private sector in Western Australia is only 13.6 per cent, why is the minister allowing CFMEU officers to become de facto WorkSafe officers by allowing WorkSafe to simply follow the CFMEU's complaints?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

- (1) I thank the member for the question in three parts. I do not have the details of the press coverage. However, I am aware that WorkSafe has carried out a number of inspections on Mr Hanssen's site. I am also aware that notices have been issued there due to lack of conformity.
- (2) I expect all people to be treated fairly and consistently by WorkSafe. Based on the information available to me I believe that is the way it behaves. I do not expect it to behave in any other way. People might make accusations because they are not happy with WorkSafe but if that agency does its work properly, as I expect - based on all the information I have it does - it will receive complaints from builders when it steps on them. It receives complaints from unions when it does not do what unions want. It has been established to uphold the law and to make sure the highest possible standards of safety prevail in our workplaces. On the whole, it does that very difficult job well. I always take complaints seriously because, from time to time, any government organisation can slip up in one instance in which things are not done as well as they should be. I have no evidence of that in Mr Hanssen's case.

I also understand that this matter was taken to the Industrial Relations Commission. Accusations were made against Mr Hanssen and his operation that the building site - I presume it is the same building site - was quite unsafe. I understand that Mr Hanssen did not provide counter evidence or seek to defend himself against those charges. On that basis, if the information provided to the Industrial Relations Commission was similar to the information given to WorkSafe, clearly it would have had to act because an issue existed.
- (3) I acknowledge that union densities are thin and the rate of union membership growth is quite slow. However, in many instances, a small number of people who have standards and enforce it can make a difference.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: The CFMEU is running WorkSafe.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Not at all. The CFMEU criticises WorkSafe quite regularly when it is not happy about situations. I do not accept the CFMEU's position, because WorkSafe is doing a good job. A year ago even Michael McLean said on radio in response to an accusation of a WorkSafe site being unsafe, "That is a union site and you can expect good standards of safety". That was from someone who is not a friend of the CFMEU. The fact is that the union sites are the safest sites. When the level of accidents and injury in the construction industry is not acceptable, the people who stand up and do something about it are to be commended. That is different from an abuse of safety issues due to industrial matters, which occurs from time to time. I have told WorkSafe and the other agencies that if there is evidence of abuse of that nature, they should take action. It occurs in a very small minority of cases. Overall, union involvement has played an integral part in improving safety in the workplace. I thought members opposite would want workers to be safe, but it seems they do not. They are quite happy to attack people because they are from the unions, which is not related to what they do in terms of delivering better safety in the workplace. Members opposite need to rethink things and understand that when

they were in government, they had no standards. Doug Shave was their icon. When in government, members opposite backed Doug Shave. They said, "Doug's a good bloke. It is the public servants. It is these nasty old people who did the wrong thing with their investment. They should have been smarter." Those members did everything to back Doug Shave because they had no standards. They continue to do that in one area after another. It is about time they woke up. I know they have a problem with the Leader of the Opposition because he has abysmal standards and, therefore, they do not have the leadership. All he wants to do is attack Western Australia. He does not want any development occurring in Western Australia while Geoff Gallop is Premier. He is happy for WA to go backwards. When the Premier was answering a question about the serious issue of health, the Leader of the Opposition simply wanted to attack Western Australians. Time after time and prior to 1993, the Liberal Opposition has shown that it has no standards. The Opposition simply cannot accept the leadership from the current Premier because it does not have any standards to which it can aspire.