

CONSTRUCTION, FORESTRY, MINING AND ENERGY UNION, INPUT ON SAFETY ISSUES

1029. Mrs C.L. EDWARDES to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection:

I refer the minister to his media release of 24 September 2002 - some 12 months ago - in which he stated -

We are seeking positive input from the CFMEU to work with us to further improve building and constructing industry safety standards . . .

- (1) Given that there have been at least 23 workplace deaths in the past 14 months and given the current industrial action taking place, ostensibly on workplace safety issues, will the minister admit that his approach of seeking positive input on safety issues from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union has failed?
- (2) Does the minister concede that his leadership failure in this area has seen the union take control of the Government's responsibility for safety issues and abuse safety concerns as an industrial issue?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

- (1)-(2) The member raised a range of points; I will take the last one first. To suggest that the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union has abused safety is a glib throwaway line, but the fact is that everyone in the industry freely recognises that CFMEU sites are the safest in the building construction industry.

Mr R.F. Johnson: A lot of them don't work.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Does the member disagree - are they not the safest sites?

Mr R.F. Johnson: A lot of them are shut down, as was the case yesterday.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The member for Hillarys can go on with such nonsense and not address the issue. He seeks to play politics with the issue. I do not refer to the member who asked the question in that comment.

Dr J.M. Woollard interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Alfred Cove.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Safety is a very important issue, and I take this question to be genuine. The situation I put to the Opposition - to which members opposite would not respond - is that it is generally accepted that unionised sites are the safest of all construction sites.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: No, they are not! Give us the statistics.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The member does not want to accept that fact. The implication is that the question attacks unions because they do a very good job with safety. The member also suggested that there was a lack of leadership, and she quoted 23 workplace deaths in 14 months. On that basis, she suggested that I, as the responsible minister, had lost control of safety. If that is the member's benchmark, I remind the member for Kingsley that in the last 14 months that she was the responsible minister, there were not 23 deaths in workplaces in Western Australia, but 32 deaths. However, the member used the 23 deaths as a benchmark to suggest that the Government has lost control of the issue. I do not believe that 23 deaths are acceptable - they are not. There have been 10 workplace deaths this year, and the number is going down. That number is still not acceptable; not a single death in the workplace is acceptable. However, for the member to suggest that the Government has lost control because 23 workplace deaths occurred in a 14-month period, when there were 32 such deaths in the comparable period when the member for Kingsley was the responsible minister, is not an attack with any validity at all.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call to order the members for Alfred Cove and Hillarys. I will call members to order if they interject when they are not involved in the question being responded to, and their interjections are designed to slow down the minister's delivery of the answer.

Point of Order

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: Will the minister please table the document from which he referred to dates?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I simply have some notes. I do not have a document to which I referred.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: Tell us the dates.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I will give the member not only the dates, but also the list of fatalities in that period. Therefore, the member will know that when she was the responsible minister, the number of workplace deaths in a 14-month period was well over the number of deaths concerning which she accused me of losing control.

Questions without Notice Resumed

