

MINISTER FOR CONSUMER AND EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION, MEETING WITH PUBLIC SECTOR
UNIONS

1. Mr R.F. JOHNSON to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection and Minister Assisting the Minister for Public Sector Management:

I refer to reports that public servants have threatened to disrupt government services again unless the Government agrees to sit down and discuss their demands for better pay and conditions.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Be quiet, member, please.

- (1) Has the minister agreed to meet union officials to discuss their demands face to face rather than using go betweens to negotiate an agreement?
- (2) Can the minister confirm that neither he nor the Premier has personally met with union officials to discuss this claim?
- (3) Does the minister concede that the reluctance of ministers to meet face to face with union officials to discuss the claims is the principal reason for agreement not being reached and for industrial action by public servants being intensified?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

(3) No.

(1)-(2) Yes. I have met union officials to discuss wage negotiations -

Mr R.F. Johnson: When?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It was in recent weeks.

Mr C.J. Barnett: How long ago?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Days. I indicated to the Community and Public Sector Union that I was happy to meet its representatives. I did so in front of the media outside Parliament yesterday. The difference I drew to the union representative's attention was that if they wanted me to negotiate, they were likely to get a worse deal. They want a lot of changes to non-salary items relating to how the public sector works. I have instructed the negotiating team to seek to accommodate requirements in a way that would not undermine the efficient running of the public sector. I do not have the technical expertise in that regard. Therefore, I would need to refer back to the head of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and directors general across the departments. It has already been referred to all directors general at a strategic management council meeting. If I negotiate without those expert people present, matters are likely to be referred back and the process would take longer. I said up front that I was willing to meet -

Mr R.F. Johnson: You could have them present with you.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I am more interested in meetings between the Leader of the Liberal Party and his deputy leader. We see on today's news that the member for Mitchell has had his endorsement threatened by someone unnamed. The rumour going around is that the Leader of the Opposition has organised someone to do the numbers to get rid of the member for the Mitchell for his disloyalty.

Point of Order

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I think the House very often indulges the minister. These comments have no relevance to the question I asked about whether he is prepared to meet union officials face to face in relation to negotiating the current pay deal.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: It's very interesting.

The SPEAKER: It may be interesting, but it is drawing a long bow to say it is relevant to the answer.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The question was based on a false premise; namely, that I have not met and I am not prepared to meet union leaders in order to try to conclude negotiations on pay deals. That is not true. I have and I will continue to do so. The point is that the member is making false allegations. Let us look at the house of members opposite. How often does the Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party meet the Deputy Leader of the Opposition when they are trying to stab each other in the back? The member for Mitchell is trying to get the numbers to take over his leader's job, and the Leader of the Liberal Party has a mate down in Bunbury

controlling the numbers in the seat of Mitchell so that the member cannot get endorsement. That is an interesting set of meetings.

Point of Order

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I believe that the minister has disregarded your direction, Mr Speaker. You clearly said that the minister's line of argument bore no relevance to the question. He has disregarded your direction, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: That question has finished.