



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILLS

**Migration Amendment (Temporary
Sponsored Visas) Bill 2013**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 26 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 26 June 2013
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Questioner
Speaker Bandt, Adam, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (12:16): To speak to some of the principles behind this bill, the Greens have argued for a long time that in this country we need to share the benefits of what may well be a once-in-a-generation mining boom fairly. We have argued that in respect of the mining tax. We have ended up with a mining tax where, if it is spreading the benefits of a boom, I reckon it is spread so thinly that most people really cannot taste it because, up until recently, we have had a situation this year where the mining tax has brought in less revenue than the government was taking from single parents by cutting their payments. We have consistently argued for a proper mining tax, for one that would allow us to fund education and health and to set Australia up for the future.

We have also argued that with respect to the jobs that flow from the mining boom in particular. We are in a situation where the owners of all our mineral wealth—the Australian people—are not getting a fair return. When we have a situation where 83 per cent of the profits are going overseas, as is the case at the moment, there is an argument for fixing that. But, more so, the jobs that have been generated from the minerals that all Australians own should also ensure a proper return to our country. That means opportunities for people to work and it also means making sure that we use some of the money for training the next generation so that we do not just have people come and work and share the benefits of the wealth and then leave. We do not want to wake up when the mining boom is over to find that all the skills have gone with it. That has been the real risk of the government's 457 program. Over a number of years I have certainly heard many stories of that program having been abused—of people coming in as 'project managers' without any requisite qualification and essentially being put to work doing any task. That obviously affects local workers, because local workers are being undercut.

If you bring someone in from overseas, they are probably less likely than an Australian worker to know how to enforce their rights in the Australian legal system and they are probably less likely to know what they are entitled to. That affects the local workers, but it also affects the workers who have come in on 457s. They have been open to significant exploitation. We have seen significant reports of that, and that is, in part, the reason the Greens have been pushing for the government to ratify the international convention on the rights of migrant workers, because abuse of this scheme hurts everyone. It hurts the people that come over here who can find themselves essentially in a form of indebted slavery and it hurts the people who do not get jobs because they are being undercut.

We have been arguing for some time that, up until the introduction of this bill, we were getting the worst of both worlds. We were getting rhetoric that verged on xenophobic, without any meaningful action. The Greens argue that we need to dial down the rhetoric, but turn up the meaningful protections for local employment. So I am pleased that the principle we have been advocating for some time, which is advertising first, has been adopted and is recognised in this bill.

One concern that we have expressed is that the protections in this bill seem to stop at workers who require degree qualifications or other similar qualifications. When there are reports in areas like nursing and engineering, where we are coming off the back of a downturn in mining and with manufacturing also under pressure, those people ought to be entitled to exactly the same protection. That is something we have advocated for strongly.

I also want to put on the record that this is not a situation where we are advocating that there should be no-one or only a limited number of people from overseas coming here to work. Having people from overseas coming and working in Australia on temporary or long-term arrangements is unquestionably a good thing. In some areas—for example, education and science—we should make sure that we remain open to people with significant expertise coming and spending time in this country. It is good for them and it is good for us.

There is also a good argument that when people are legitimately here on holiday or other arrangements they are entitled to perform some kind of work while they are here, provided that that does not turn into a backdoor way of abusing the system. Provided that it does not, it benefits those people and it benefits us. Some people are lucky enough ultimately to translate their work here on a temporary visa into citizenship, and I have met many of those people, including in my electorate of Melbourne. But at the end of the day our primary responsibility as the

Australian parliament should be to ensure that we look after the Australian people. If that means standing up to big business and saying, 'No, you can't get away with whatever you want; you need to spread some of the benefits of this boom and of operating a successful company in Australia to local workers,' then we should insist on that.

Aside from those issues of areas where the bill ought to be improved, as I have been advocating for some time, I am pleased that this bill was brought before the parliament and that we will have an opportunity to pass it before parliament rises.