



Speech by

Mr T. SULLIVAN

MEMBER FOR CHERMSIDE

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BILL

Mr SULLIVAN (Chermside—ALP) (2.55 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Bill before the House, which addresses the very heart of Labor policy. I came into the Labor Party through my involvement with QATIS, the independent teachers union. Unacceptable practices in the workplace convinced me of the need for workers to unite if we were to gain fair pay and conditions. It was not just the pay levels and conditions per se that concerned me but also the unfair variations in working conditions, whereby some workers were disadvantaged when carrying out the same work as other, better paid employees. One example is that, although Queensland State school teachers received portable long service leave after 10 years, teachers in non-Government schools had to work 15 years in the one school before being eligible for such leave. Another example is that in Sydney in the early 1970s, many non-Government school teachers were being paid less than 60% of the State teachers award and pressure was being put on Queensland employers to cut pay rates in this State. That is why, in 1977, I was one of a group of teachers from non-Government schools who ran for elected office for QATIS and who secured 13 of the 14 available positions.

One of the first cases that the new QATIS council tackled was an unjust dismissal case. Two teachers from the State system were invited by one principal to teach at a local convent school. They gave up their long service leave and other accumulated benefits to teach at that school. Three years later a new principal came to the school, found out that the teachers were not Catholics and sacked both of those women. That was a totally unfair, unjust and unreasonable situation that had to be addressed. We won the first reinstatement case in the non-Government school sector in 60 years and sent a clear message to employers that workers had to be treated in a just and reasonable manner.

Over the past two days, the speeches from the Opposition side in relation to this Bill have shown the gulf that exists between the conservative side of politics and Labor. Many of the speeches of the members opposite would have been at home in 19th century industrial England, where workers were considered as merely factory fodder. Good industrial relations legislation treats workers with respect and provides a system wherein differences can be addressed in a reasonable, non-violent, balanced and impartial manner. We do not want the Reith/Howard, Santoro/Borbidge style of industrial law that permits and encourages the Patrick stevedore type of dispute. We do not want dogs and the goons in balaclavas; we want a strong industrial court system that provides a balanced approach to disputes between employers and employees. I support legislation that acknowledges that there is an unequal power relationship between the employer and the employee and addresses that relationship through fair industrial processes.

I belong to the Australian Labor Party, one of the few pure examples of a political workers' movement in the world. Unions are an integral part of our structure, and rightly so. I am proud to be a member of my own independent teachers union; I am proud to be a member of the Australian Labor Party. As a Labor member of Parliament, I will keep working to advance the interests of workers throughout Queensland.
