




Speech By
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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATIONS) AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (8.27 pm): I rise to speak on the Industrial Relations (Transparency and Accountability of Industrial Organisations) and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2013. Whilst this bill addresses a range of issues that required addressing, I will focus on the changes that will protect and enhance the rights of workers—those who choose to join a union and those who do not wish to do so. Freedom of association should be a fundamental right of all Queenslanders and all Australians. It seems it should be an essential and perpetual feature of our democracy, but we should not forget that in practice it is a recent development in Australia and one that, despite its desire to do so, federal Labor has been unable to undo. Presumably, that is because it is now such an electorally damaging position to take to force workers to join an organisation essentially against their own will, and rightly so. According to the ABS, only 13 per cent of private sector employees now choose to be a member of a trade union. Trade unions should exist to support their membership. The question is: what do their members want?

Whatever they have been doing over the past 15 years obviously is not offering an appealing value proposition because membership continues to drop. Unions have become political campaign machines above protecting their members, funnelling money from their members' pockets into the coffers of the Labor Party or into campaigns that will support them or disparage their opposition.

This bill introduces a new framework where industrial organisations must ballot members when they wish to spend more than \$10,000 on a political matter. This ballot must be made available to all members and describe the proposed campaign, the associated expenditure and for how long the campaign is proposed to continue. It will require the support of more than half the votes received for authorisation from the membership. It empowers the membership to have a say as to where their dues are being spent. These organisations purport to support their membership in their employment, but, when they have historically supported or are even officially affiliated with a political party, how can they do so when they have a serious conflict of interest in play?

The Queensland Nurses Union has shown it is all a little bit too hard for them. An issue, one that would have affected or at least touched each of their members, should have seen them up in arms as government incompetence hurt their members and their members' families—that is, the Queensland Health payroll debacle. Surely ensuring that their membership is actually paid correctly for the work they do should be fundamental to the work of a trade union? The payroll debacle is the sort of issue that if it happened on our watch it would have seen a prolonged and well-funded campaign designed to embarrass the LNP, and it would have been easy. I do not think there is a person in Queensland who thinks the disaster was in any way justified or does not feel for those nurses and their families who were and continue to be affected.

If we look at the campaign archive on the QNU website, there is a list of current and previous campaigns the QNU have elected to spend their members' membership fees on. How the carbon

price is directly linked to nursing I have no idea, but the union saw fit to spend its members' funds on this. If their website is accurate and has not had campaigns added or removed or placed out of order then they only decided to campaign on the payroll issue in July 2012.

Yes, there are records of very polite conversations and correspondence between the union and the previous Labor government on this issue published on their site. There is also information outlining their regular meetings with the Premier and the health minister. But it was not until the LNP won government that the tone of their information on this issue changed. From outlining that 'Queensland Health announced that it will implement a package of measures designed to progress payroll matters under the Bligh government' to 'We've had enough' under the Newman government indicates a serious issue of bias.

Just months after the change of government they set up a protest email facility so that their membership could email the Premier, the health minister and the chair of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee years after the issue raised its head and was affecting its own members. Hilariously, their page that links to this email facility has the following tag line: 'We must speak quickly and with one voice.' Quickly—the problem was already a year old by that stage. When Labor was in government there was no email campaign. There were very few protests in the street and there was no ad buy.

According to the QNU's ECQ return, they spent more than \$60,000 prior to the last election campaign on things like advertising and election Q&As. Presumably this expenditure was made on similar campaigns to those we are hearing on the radio right now—that is, bagging the Premier and the federal opposition leader through deceptive language and a concerted effort to mislead the public.

This bill is about empowering union members so that, if they wish, their funds can be solely invested into supporting them in their workplace, not on overtly partisan political campaigns. If the QNU is truly an organisation set up to protect their members' rights then these funds are much better spent providing services to these members rather than on efforts to affect the vote of the general public. But if their membership agrees that it should be campaigning on broader issues then the membership will have the opportunity to support these moves through a ballot. If the membership wishes to have their dues spent on campaigning for climate change policy, fair enough, but it is time that we let them have their say.

As a registered nurse, I obviously know many nurses. I know that a lot of nurses join unions, but they do not join the QNU to become quasi-members of the ALP. Nurses only join a union for indemnity insurance for potential malpractice, not to fund ALP campaigns. A classic example of this was in the lead-up to the 2007 federal election and the Your Rights at Work campaign. The unions were very busy in all the tearooms in all the hospitals around Queensland trying to convince nurses that if they elected John Howard for another term their penalty rates would be in jeopardy. Most nurses should know that they are paid under a state award and not under a federal award. That was another porky from the Labor Party.

We have TV ads and rubbish campaigns about selling our hospitals at the moment. This is another scare campaign and more lies from the QNU. If nurses really want proper representation, they have an alternative to the QNU. They can join the Royal College of Nursing Australia, which is the professional body for nurses. The Royal College of Nursing has its own indemnity insurance. In fact, since we passed the national harmonisation laws where all nurses are entitled and required to have registration and need indemnity insurance, they could actually even go to a private provider.

We have the likes of Beth Mohle and our old friend Grace Grace in the QNU these days making sure that nurses continue to think that it is only the Labor Party that they should vote for. Nurses do not join a union to vote for the Labor Party. I am going to make sure that every nurse I know knows that a percentage of their QNU contributions actually go directly to funding Labor campaigns.

Where was the QNU when nurses in Queensland were being bullied left, right and centre? That is the repository for all bullying and intimidation claims in Queensland. Nurses go to a union if they are bullied. I never saw any stories in the whole time that Labor was in power in Queensland where the QNU actually stood up for nurses.

I congratulate the Attorney-General on this bill. It is a sensible move that is about allowing union members to decide if they wish their hard earned money to be spent on issues relating directly to their own employment or political campaigns. I commend the bill to the House.