




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (8.20 pm): I rise to support the Industrial Relations (Transparency and Accountability of Industrial Organisations) and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2013. Firstly, I thank the secretariat of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee for the work that they do in supporting the committee. I also thank all of the committee members and, of course, all of the people who put in written submissions and attended the public hearings. Tonight I will be brief in the interests of other speakers having an opportunity to participate in the debate.

Firstly, I congratulate the Attorney-General for ensuring that we are a government that will act in the interests of all Queenslanders by guarding against corruption and the misuse of trust and position by anyone or any organisation. Others would hide behind a thin veneer of representing a disengaged and disfranchised membership and suggest that the fact that they hold a position means that they can act in any way they like without account to the membership. However, the suggestion that you take away freedom of speech by giving someone a democratic vote does not make sense. It does not make sense to say that giving people an absolute and enshrined right to vote and have their voice heard on any decision put to the membership so that the majority decides what the membership wants somehow reduces the freedom of speech of the membership. It would appear to me that the freedom of speech of the membership is under most threat from those who purport to represent them but, in fact, who will not allow them to vote on whether they should or should not be represented in the way that has been suggested.

I give a couple of examples from personal experience. I worked for a student union for 12 years. I worked on the commercial side of that union. While we were negotiating our enterprise bargaining agreement, I was the representative of management. That was with the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union. We had about 120 employees. The union did not want what the employee representatives wanted. The employee representatives wanted part-time work, because a lot of them were students studying engineering degrees and other degrees at the University of Southern Queensland. The union wanted to turn all of those part-time jobs, which were helping the students pay their way through university, into full-time jobs. The workers, the people who were paying their union membership, asked me to represent them in the negotiations. I was on the other side of the negotiations. It was absolute lunacy that the union would hold a position that the members did not want, when the members agreed with exactly what management was proposing. That was just one small example that I had personal experience with. It took several months before we could persuade the union that maybe it should do what the members wanted. With a piece of legislation such as this, when you cut away the hysteria and the freedom of speech and other arguments that have been put forward, what you are doing is giving people a democratic opportunity to vote on how their money and their organisation is going to act. I cannot think of anything better than for that to be the case in a democracy such as ours.

Several submissions were made to the committee. People put forward the idea that I stand here elected. I represent the entire electorate of Toowoomba North and I was voted in. One cannot suggest for a moment that a union has the checks and balances of this place when we have an opposition that is fully funded and we have processes that have been built up over a very long period. To suggest that the members of a union would be served as well as constituents are by this institution is simply belittling this institution. One cannot suggest for a moment that denying union members a vote on how their money is spent is in any way similar to people coming in here and presenting a budget or debating legislation, particularly as we have gone to an election and we have told people what we are going to do. The union bosses are out there making decisions without reference to anybody.

Ms Trad interjected.

Mr WATTS: I will take the interjection about backflips. Isn't it interesting that the interjection comes in, 'What about the backflip?' I ask: what about the backflip? The Labor Party takes money from unions. The unions publicly opposed the sale of assets and publicly opposed what the government was going to do, but they donated money to Labor. The workers did not want it. Who backflipped? That is right: the Labor government backflipped. It let down its members, it let down its union and it let down everybody who had paid money into that institution to represent them, simply by going completely and utterly against everything that that union wanted. If that union did want the assets sold, why did not they stand up and say so?

Ms Trad: Because they ran a campaign, in a democracy.

Mr WATTS: They ran a campaign against the asset sales; that is correct. If their members had had the opportunity to have a vote, how would they have voted? How will this legislation stop the members voting to decide how their money should be spent?

Ms Trad interjected.

Mr WATTS: You will get your opportunity to speak in a moment, member for South Brisbane. When you stand up, you will have the opportunity—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! Member, please address your comments through the chair.

Mr WATTS: Through the chair, the member for South Brisbane will have the opportunity to have her say in a moment. I challenge her to suggest how giving the members the opportunity to vote on how their money is spent is not in the interests of the members. I will be very interested to hear that. I will not take up too much more of the time of the House tonight. I know that there are plenty of others who want to speak. I support this bill. I support the Attorney-General. I think the unions should be held to high account. They have a special place in our history. They have a special place in the institutions of industrial law in this state. They should be held to high account so that their members can see how their leadership acts and, when the leadership wants to act to make a decision, they simply run a poll to decide whether the membership agrees with it. I commend the bill to the House and I look forward to hearing the member for South Brisbane.