




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (RESTORING FAIRNESS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (4.24 pm): I rise with much pride to speak in favour of the Industrial Relations (Restoring Fairness) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015—or, as it seems to be known as tonight, the ‘unionism bill’—currently before the House. I am one of the United Voice members to whom the member for Mansfield referred earlier, and I am quite proud to say that I am a member of United Voice. Before I move into my speech can I just note that I will not take up the full 20 minutes tonight because I know there are a lot of members who want to have their five or 10 minutes, so I will cut my contribution short this evening.

Prior to becoming a member of parliament I was a proud union delegate representing paramedics covering two states between Victoria and Queensland—as some would probably say, a pesky unionist, communist and other words like that. I have heard them all. During this time and over two states, the public sector that I was involved in worked well. We had workers who were represented by delegates and work colleagues who could work with management and who could consult on changes that were happening in the workplace. I do not think it is too unrealistic to ask that, if something is going to happen, two parties from opposite sides of the fence could sit down and talk about it, get some feedback on how things could be changed, generate new ideas or perhaps even provide cost-saving ideas to the company or to the organisation that everyone works for because, at the end of the day, workers, union delegates and employers essentially are on the same page. Everyone wants a job to come back to the next day and they want to be able to generate an income—whether it is through profits in industry or through wages—and to be able to go home, feed the family and maybe have a holiday. But a couple of years ago in Queensland that changed when the incoming government at the time decided that they wanted to make a law against it, and that is the law that we are essentially debating tonight.

I want to acknowledge the Finance and Administration Committee, of which I am part, and the member for Bulimba for the work that has been done. We had a very short time frame for this—some 17 days—but we held a number of meetings. I will not go through them all, but we had meetings at various times of the day. Some were held by teleconference. The number of public hearings that were held is certainly testament to the members that we have on both sides of the House. As the chair pointed out before, I also acknowledge the work of the secretariat. The document that most members have is some 100 pages long. I think it is probably the thickest committee document that has hit the House so far in this parliament.

Jumping forward to a few key issues that we have seen so far, the first one relates to the issue of privacy. This was discussed at some length during committee meetings and in committee hearings; it was raised in conversations with representatives from unions, with union delegates, with employer organisations such as the LGAQ and also with the department. As a result, the LNP members on the committee asked that we interview the Privacy Commissioner. The government members agreed, and

I believe it was on Thursday last week we had a public hearing with the Privacy Commissioner. The Privacy Commissioner was quite clear in what she said—

Clause 31 refers to the right to inspect and request information by an authorised industrial officer. I understand from reading the explanatory notes that it reinstates the version of the section that existed prior to the amendments in 2013, but the way the Information Privacy Act operates is that it is subject to other legislation. So this will override the privacy principles with respect to disclosure in these circumstances. Indeed, the privacy principles themselves talk about disclosure being permitted where it is authorised by law. Because this provision appears in the Industrial Relations Act, it is authorised by law and permitted under the Information Privacy Act.

So there is no issue with respect to privacy. The Privacy Commission is the entity we go to for advice on such matters. The Privacy Commissioner has ruled that there is no issue on privacy.

We spoke to other people at the hearings we conducted. I particularly want to focus not on the paid union secretaries, policy advisers, research advisers or representatives of LGAQ or other employment bodies but on the union delegates who appeared before the committee on Monday, 25 May. I want to highlight some of the comments they made, particularly in response to a question that I put to all of them about why they joined the union, when they joined the union and whether they were coerced in any way, shape or form. At the first hearing we heard from a doctor from Cairns with whom I happen to have done some work previously, Dr Sandy Donald, who is a public health delegate with Together Queensland.

Mrs Miller: A good man.

Mr CRAWFORD: He is a very good man—a very tall man also. Dr Donald stated—

I come from Cairns. Far North Queensland lost a number of existing senior doctors as a result of the previous government's attack on the health system, but we also had a number of newly qualified specialists who withdrew their job applications and moved interstate or went into private practice. Amongst the remaining specialists, trust is gone.

To have that comment come from a doctor is certainly quite alarming to me. When I asked Dr Donald whether he was pressured to join the union under previous encouragement policies, he responded—

There was certainly no pressure at all. There was union material in the workplace not particularly prominent, but visible, and I joined in fact because I had seen some things going wrong and wanted to be able to help my colleagues.

Having seen the work Dr Sandy Donald has done in Far North Queensland, I cannot dispute that he has gone on to look after his colleagues. I put the same question to Jo O'Shanesy, who is a child safety and disability services delegate for Together Queensland, and she responded—

No, I was not pressured ... I joined the union on my third stint in child safety in 2003. I did that when an organiser came around to the workplace and explained some of the entitlements and services that they could provide to me. At no point was I pressured; in fact, as a social worker it is incumbent on me that at all times I am looking at matters of social justice and fairness, and therefore it was only sensible for me to join the union.

This is an example of an organiser coming around and speaking to an employee about the benefits that they otherwise might not have seen or heard about. If that had not happened, we would not have had this wonderful person stepping forward and being a delegate in her workplace. Who would have thought being a delegate in your workplace would have you sitting in Parliament House in front of a parliamentary committee talking about something as significant as this?

Some other people we spoke to included Mr Michael Beak, an ambulance delegate and paramedic with United Voice, the same organisation and position I held; Mr Des Hardman, a health delegate for medical imaging with United Voice; and Ms Kate MacDonald, a local government employee and vice-president of The Services Union's local authorities industry committee. I will relate some of the comments made by these people. Mr Hardman said—

I was never obviously pressured to join a union and I was relieved to be asked.

Mr Beak said—

I cannot remember how I joined the union it was that long ago, so I suggest I was not pressured at all.

He then said—

Prior to the introduction of these laws, the then union LHMU and the Queensland Ambulance Service had an outstanding partnership. With the introduction of these changes, that disappeared.

He went on to say—

Now we are at a stage where we have unscrupulous managers putting the fear of God into employees ...

A statement like that from a paramedic in Queensland certainly concerns me. Ms MacDonald said—

Could I add that the Newman legislation grew delegates on its own. We went from having four delegates at Mackay; I have 13 now. It was not that we went out and said, 'Do you want to be a delegate?' They came to us, because of the unfairness of the current legislation. It was definitely not about us going on a sales pitch as a union to get members or to get an increase in our delegates; they were coming to us.

Finally, so my colleagues can take their turn to speak, I simply want to refer to the Borbidge-Sheldon review. There are a couple of sections that I think are pertinent to this debate. Section 1.6 states—

Undoubtedly, the leadership of the government contributed to the election loss including:

- the breaking of the promise that public servants had 'nothing to fear';
- the perception of arrogance arising from not listening to the people;
- pursuing the large scale privatisation of assets ...
- the alienation of key stakeholders in the decision making process;

Section 2.3 states—

The decision to sack 14,000 public servants and the manner in which the issue was handled poisoned relations with the people who were needed to embrace and implement the government's reform agenda and surprised and shocked voters.

We knew this at the time. We knew this during the election campaign. It surprises me to actually read it coming from the LNP.

There is one comment I would like to pull out in relation to unions. They refer to being 'undermined by a fierce and ruthless union led guerrilla war'. I cannot remember a time when I got painted up in camouflage! Another comment in the report that I think is pertinent is 'a belief that an early election would take the opposition by surprise and diminish the willingness of the union movement to campaign over the holiday period'. They got it wrong. On 31 January we showed it.

My final comment—this has nothing to do with this particular bill—is that I note section 12.1 states—

The party's social media is not in the space with where it can offset its opponent's diversity.

It is tweeting, not twittering.