




Speech By
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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (RESTORING FAIRNESS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Miss BOYD** (Pine Rivers—ALP) (9.42 pm): I rise tonight to speak in support of the Industrial Relations (Restoring Fairness) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. It is hard to believe that we are here again 124 years later. The party of which I am a member—the great Queensland Labor Party—was formed in this state 124 years ago because of a simple grievance. It was formed because, as long as Queensland could take away the rights of working people with the stroke of a pen, workers had no hope of negotiating fairly with entrenched employer powers and entrenched upper-class privilege.

The Labor Party was born in Queensland out of a failed industrial campaign in 1891. Less than one decade later the world saw its first Labor government in Queensland—short lived though it was. This week we celebrated 100 years since the TJ Ryan government—the first popularly elected Labor government in Queensland.

The parallels between 1915 and 2015 are striking. A premier wins an election with a tough-on-crime message, with a cuts agenda, alienates the community with industrial reforms and by neglecting the economy, loses an election in his own seat in dramatic fashion and a reforming Labor government comes into power.

I recall working with my union, United Voice—the health professionals union—during the years of the Newman and Bligh governments. Both governments negotiated hard from an employer perspective. Both were zealous in seeking public sector efficiencies. Both were seeking to keep the Queensland Health as small as possible. However, only the Newman government sought to pull a swiftie and change the rules of the game.

Only Newman would dare to try to remove the independence of the industrial commission. Only Newman would grant his ministers overriding rights on agreement. Only Newman would create a list of prohibited items from industrial agreements. Radical notions like workplace health and safety, training, rostering arrangements and—shock horror—wage increases were banned from agreements. It was hubris and arrogance at its finest. The LNP do not like the campaigning and fighting capacity of Queensland unions so they targeted them. In targeting them they forgot that those whom they were really targeting were ordinary, hardworking, committed Queenslanders.

By removing the protections we are reinstating today, the LNP had a free-for-all attack on the government departments our daily lives depend upon. It was truly sickening to watch. I recall more than one conversation on the election trail that made me both sick to the stomach and brought tears to my eyes. Every single worker touched by the LNP through the removal of protections was a sad and sorry story. But it was not just a story; it was a reality. Lives were torn apart and, for many, lives are not yet put back together.

Do you know what? Queenslanders do not like it when other Queenslanders get picked on. They do not like governments targeting their school staff or their health professionals. They do not like seeing their mates hard done by. So they stood up, rallied and took action. They petitioned and voted in Redcliffe and Stafford. When none of those things hit the message home to the Tories, they rose up in January in a record-breaking fashion and flushed the crew opposite out of power. It was just one of the reasons they were voted out, but it was a big one. The result in January is my Queensland Labor Party living up to its heritage and standing mission in this state—its entire reason for being; to protect fairness for working people.

So what does this bill do? In short, it does not do anything new. It takes us back to the fairness that existed before the time of the Newman government—a nightmare from which this state is still waking with relief. The measures in this bill will be familiar to anyone in our Public Service who has been there for more than three years. The measures will not be unfamiliar to pharmacists, teachers, child safety officers and so many hardworking public servants. They will not be unfamiliar because this bill reinstates the measures that were longstanding protections. These protections were stripped away in a cruel and callous way by those opposite. Workers have been mistreated and at the same time unions demonised to make way for the small government ideology of the LNP. It is the same old story—they tear it down, we build it up; they mess it up, we clean it up; they tear it apart, we put it back together.

Here is how we are going to put things back together. This bill reinstates employment conditions for government workers that were lost as a result of the changes to the Industrial Relations Act 1999 in both 2012 and 2013 at the hands of those opposite. This bill reinstates the independence of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, the QIRC, when determining wage cases. This bill returns the commission to its rightful place. The commission will once again be a layperson tribunal where a level playing field will be established between employees and their union advocates and employers and their advocates.

Lastly, this bill restores the longstanding ability for union officials and delegates to freely communicate with and access members, to work together to make their workplaces better, to make our government departments more effective, more efficient and fair. I repeat: these are longstanding customs and practices. These include industrial provisions such as contracting, employment security, union encouragement, private practice and redundancy provisions. They are not new. They are not revolutionary. They are things that workers have been doing through their unions in our state for decades. They are protections, rights and entitlements that public servants have always had. Those opposite stripped them away in their failed experiment.

As a principle, workers should always be allowed to talk and negotiate with their boss about any item they wish to raise. This is a principle of honest communication that was wrecked under the LNP. Their changes meant that a group of workers, like Queensland ambulance officers or firefighters, could have their agreements intervened upon at the discretion of the government of the day during negotiations. They would be referred to the government appointed commissioners for arbitration. These commissioners would be put on short-term contracts at the government's discretion. These commissioners were supposed to adjudicate these referrals without fear or favour? Please.

It was an LNP commission set up not to be a tribunal for dispute resolution but to implement LNP policy. The commission had its hands tied behind its back. Pay increases could only be awarded in line with the policy of the government of the day. Even if the commission felt that their skills, duties and responsibilities deserved more or a higher increase was fair, it was bound by the government's budgetary position. As I have said previously in this place, it was rank hypocrisy of those opposite to award themselves extravagant increases while denying the rest of our state's public servants even fair cost-of-living increases.

This bill re-establishes the independence of the commission by repealing the provisions that made it a policy enforcement body and return its powers as an arbitration tribunal. As I have shared with this House, I proudly worked as an official for one of Queensland's largest and strongest unions. I have appeared before the QIRC to advocate for workers. Like all tribunals and courts, I understand the importance of fairness and balance in our state's industrial commission. It is an underpinning element of any democratic society that we get a fair hearing for our grievances.

Those opposite ignored the grievances of Queenslanders while they were in power. They did not want to talk about the lion's share of these measures in this bill and they are not focusing on them here tonight. In their paranoia of union hate, they cannot move past the fact that Queensland workers through their unions campaigned in the community in January and we won, that employees once

again can talk to their unions in their workplace, that they can talk about unions in their workplace, that they can hang a flyer on their union notice board, that they can have a discussion with their colleagues as a union about what will make their workplace better or what will make their jobs better.

Unionists are workers who are striving to achieve better conditions of life and work for others. Unionists are people with a deep appreciation and regard for democracy. Unionists fight for a fair go for all.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Miss BOYD: He does not want to—

An honourable member: He's being very provocative.

Miss BOYD: He sure is. Unionists formed our party to carry these values into parliament and we do it once again here proudly with this bill. Solidarity forever, comrades. I commend the bill to the House.