




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2016

MOTION: CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY, INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATIONS

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (6.03 pm): I rise to speak against this motion. Wouldn't it be good if the member for Clayfield had bothered to take a deep breath before launching into an all-too-predictable union-bashing diatribe? We heard it from the previous opposition leader and we are hearing it again. It is the same old LNP, just recycled; there are no changes. Now they have brought out the member for Kawana. They hid him away for six months during the election campaign, but now they have brought him out. He is the worst shadow industrial relations minister and attorney-general this state has ever seen, and they have brought him out again.

This motion talks about an illegal strike at the Sunshine Coast University Hospital site at the behest of the union masters of the CFMEU and the ETU last week. There is nothing to indicate that this was an illegal strike. I might point out that this matter falls under the federal IR jurisdiction. Let me give those opposite a good lesson on industrial relations, because they have no idea. The fact is that electrical workers on the site have taken protected industrial action as part of the current bargaining negotiation with their employer, the Nilsen company. That is their right, provided they meet all the requirements for protected industrial action under the federal act. Unlike those opposite, I have in my hand a copy of the order, which I am more than happy to table for their benefit.

There are no orders against the ETU. There are no orders against the CFMEU. The right to take industrial action in pursuit of bargaining claims is a long recognised element of industrial labour law. It has been an integral part of the Australian labour law under both sides of politics since the early 1990s. The Electrical Trades Union is bargaining with an employer. It took protected industrial action.

I do not know if those opposite have ever been on a worksite—I know the member for Kallangur would know this—but let me tell them that when you are on a building site of that size and you do not have electricians onsite the health and safety risks escalate exponentially. The other workers on that site operating machinery, digging around wires and drilling into holes have grave concerns for their safety when electricians are not on the site, and for safety reasons they walked off the site as well. The commission has recognised that right in the order, because it says that industrial action does not include an action taken by a reasonably concerned employee about the imminent risk to his or her health or safety. As well, there are many employers who, in recognising that there are not electricians onsite, allow workers to go home because of safety concerns. In addition, a worker can also reasonably refuse to take on other duties or go to another site if, for example, they have not received proper induction.

The disgusting slur on the union movement by those opposite is nothing short of reprehensible. These are legal, protected actions. There have been no orders against any union at the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, yet those opposite are blabbering away. They do not want to listen to the truth, but I will make them listen to the truth.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Pause the clock.

Ms GRACE: You may not like it, but I will dish it out.

Mr SPEAKER: We will have some silence so I can hear the minister.

Ms GRACE: Incompetent, predictable and absolutely reprehensible. Let me tell members about the ABCC. The ABCC was an abject failure. The multi-million dollar Heydon royal commission did not even recommend the reinstatement of the ABCC, yet this nation is going to a double dissolution election for something not recommended by the federal government's own royal commission. Let me tell members what happened with regard to that. Productivity went backwards under the ABCC and workplace injuries spiked. That is what happened under the ABCC.

Those opposite talk about restoring the law in the construction industry. Invoking the rule of law is a bit rich coming from those who support the reinstatement of a body which would have unchecked broad coercive powers to compel ordinary workers to give evidence and be interviewed with no right to silence or privilege against self-incrimination. This side of the House will never support the ABCC, and we do not support the opposition's union bashing.