Speech By

Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2016

MOTION

Trade Unions

Mr FURNER (Ferny Grove—ALP) (6.00 pm): I move the following amendment—

That all words after 'Queenslanders' be deleted and the following words inserted:

'by:

1. preserving the longstanding independence of the Industrial Relations Commission that protects jobs and prevents significant damage to the Queensland economy; and
2. maintaining important accountability and transparency measures for registered industrial organisations in Queensland.'

I rise to speak in support of the amendment. Just like groundhog day, those opposite come in here with their antiunion rhetoric. We hear it over and over again, like a broken record. Those opposite know no bounds. They come in here with no policies, they attack unions and anyone else they oppose. One day they will come in here with a set of policies to indicate what they stand for and what they might look like if they were to form government one day in the long future. They are complaining about maintaining important accountability and transparency measures, but only if those accountability and transparency measures apply to unions.

We have just completed an independent review of Queensland's industrial relations laws, which was the first comprehensive review in 17 years. Since 1998, there have been significant changes in the Queensland industrial relations landscape. For many years I have followed industrial relations. Certainly over a period many laws have changed, which generally happens when governments change. When a Labor government comes in, they look at laws to protect workers and the members who are represented by their unions. Of course, when those opposite come in, they make changes to erode the conditions of workers, erode the functions of unions and put workers at a disadvantage. We saw a prime example of that in 2005 when the then federal government brought in WorkChoices. We have just come through a federal election at which Mr Turnbull did not have the intestinal fortitude to put up his industrial relations changes, yet we know in his back pocket he has changes to erode penalty rates, reduce conditions for workers and further erode protections for those he purports to represent.

The takeover of Queensland's industrial relations laws in 2005 resulted in the state's IR coverage being focused almost exclusively on the state's core Public Service workers and local government workers. Our industrial relations laws need to be updated to reflect the changing realities. I am pleased to say that our new industrial relations system does just what the member for Indooroopilly's motion suggests: it will maintain accountability and transparency measures for all industrial organisations—employers and unions of employees—by aligning them with the industrial organisation provisions of the Fair Work Act.

However, first let us rewind to 2013 and look at the harsh realities of the Newman-Nicholls regime. Under the guise of 'greater confidence in the governance of industrial organisations', the member for Kawana introduced some of the most draconian and backward industrial laws in this parliament's history. The increased administrative burden and excessive reporting requirements associated with the new laws were extreme, to say the least. As an example, under those laws there was a requirement for a register of credit card and cab charge account spending only for employee organisations. I reflect on how some of those changes affected members of the branch committee of management of those unions. They sat on those committees doing the honourable thing of ensuring the accountability of the organisations and the unions but were targeted by those opposite. Are we to assume that issues such as the inappropriate or fraudulent use of credit cards or cab charges do not occur with employer organisations? Do they only occur with unions? Obviously, as is typical of those opposite, there is a focus only on unions.

Thankfully, the report from the recent review of the Industrial Relations Act recommends the equal treatment of organisations, both employer and employee, in relation to this matter and that the burden on employee organisations beyond the requirements that apply to employer organisations be abolished. That recommendation was unanimously agreed to by all members of the reference group, employee and employer. Had those opposite checked with some of those organisations, such as the Australian Industry Group, the CCIQ, the LGAQ, the Bar Association of Queensland and the Queensland Law Society, perhaps they would have realised that those organisations accept what was presented to them. However, not only did the member for Kawana's law manage to increase the administrative load on unions and employers but also the ongoing red tape—

(Time expired)