




Speech By
Linus Power

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2017

MOTION: UNIONS

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (5.30 pm): I rise to support the motion as amended by the member for Brisbane Central. The original motion moved by the member for Kawana reveals once again the LNP's obsession with organisations that seek to represent workers—the Queensland unions. That is the attitude of those opposite. They think that workers are bludgers. That is their attitude.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr POWER: We see the evidence in that the member for Kawana says that Queensland workers are bludgers. We know that wage growth for workers is flat and falling as a share of national income. It is time for the LNP to reconsider its obsessive entrenched position on unions. This problem has been identified by the Productivity Commission looking at wage earners' share of growth and prosperity. We know that unions of employees that have a significant presence in society increase the share for ordinary workers. We know that they make work safer and make more stable forms of employment. We know that unions help provide a greater share of profits. We also know that where unions are weaker where conservative governments attack them work is more dangerous and workers are paid less and are often less productive. We know that in many economically developed countries the share for workers has been reduced even as the size of the economy has increased. Australia is not immune from this process. In the seventies wages as a share of GDP peaked at about 68 per cent. It was 61 per cent in 1990 but now, thanks to attacks from people like the LNP, it has fallen to just 56 per cent. It is no wonder that those who rely on wages look to this place to give them a fairer share for their hard-earned work.

The LNP's obsessive and destructive attacks on unions are not helping workers. Attacks on unions mean that there is not a voice for workers to get a fair share of rising national wealth. Unions are not as involved as they are in Germany or Japan to involve workers in upskilling and increasing both productivity and wages. Unions are not as much a partner in the discussion when faced with the global forces that maintain jobs, and we know that jobs are changing. Skilled workers are needed more and low-skilled workers are being pushed out. We need to involve workers in those skills. We also know that globalisation makes it tougher and effectively increases the supply of low- and middle-skilled workers, reducing job opportunities and changing our economy. We also know that when governments like the Newman-Nicholls government take an adversarial approach they hurt both business and workers. Under the Newman-Nicholls period, days lost reached 24.6 days per thousand employees which was the highest of any state going back to 2004. Workers lost out and businesses lost out too, all because the LNP wanted to set up an anti-union, dog-eat-dog system of industrial relations. We cannot go back to those divisive days.

The other part of this motion is how society should act when presented with unfair bad laws put forward by LNP governments at a state and federal level, especially laws designed to stifle unionism and workers collectively acting to ensure safety, dignity and fairer economic return for workers. We in the Queensland Labor Party do not believe in breaking the unfair laws of the LNP; we believe in changing them. We on the side of this House support Bill Shorten. He said to all Queenslanders—

If you don't like a law, if you think a law is unjust, use the democratic process to get it changed ... We believe in changing bad laws, not breaking them.

So many of the new MPs on this side of the House saw a bad government in the Newman-Nicholls government—a government with bad laws, with unjust laws, with antiworker laws. We did not break the laws; we joined together to put forward fairer laws, just laws, laws that backed workers instead of attacking them, laws that recognise their work instead of calling them bludgers like the member for Kawana did earlier tonight. We said to Queenslanders: ‘Come with us. Don’t break laws. Come doorknocking. Sign a petition. Rally together. Campaign on the phone and online. Fight the injustice of the LNP the democratic way.’ After three years of injustice we saw the results when the unfairness of the Newman-Nicholls government was ended. We can do the same thing federally.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Sorry, member for Logan, but there are a couple of members whose intention is to disrupt your contribution.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: No. We have 22 seconds to go.

Mr POWER: I urge every worker to reject the LNP’s attacks on them—those that call them bludgers—and the unions that represent them. Do it the democratic way—through the ballot box and through convincing your friends and your family. We do not have to put up with a federal government that continues to attack the rights of workers, attacks the wages of workers and attacks the penalty rates and safety of workers. Join Labor. Make a fairer society.