




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

Record of Proceedings, 1 May 2019

MOTION

Labour Movement

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (2.22 pm): It is an honour to stand here today to speak in support of this motion because this motion marks the achievements that have been accumulated in Queensland for over 160 years. These are struggles and achievements that were happening before we even became Queensland, and there have been many achievements and we have heard them already: the eight-hour day, four weeks annual leave, a decent minimum wage, penalty rates for those working family-unfriendly hours and superannuation.

The list of achievements achieved on behalf of working Queenslanders under the Palaszczuk government is impressive. There are the industrial manslaughter laws to hold negligent employers to account, the first in Australia; the labour hire licensing laws to protect vulnerable workers from exploitation, once again the first state in Australia to do so; legislating an entitlement to 10 days paid domestic and family violence leave, the first state in Australia to do so; and introducing a code of practice and new electrical safety regulations to ensure that the solar industry is safe, and I acknowledge the good work done by my friend the member for Kurwongbah on this. There are also workers compensation reforms to ensure that workers with CWP receive their full and just entitlements.

We have been building these achievements in Queensland since 1857. In 1857 the Brisbane Labour Alliance formed with just 10 workers, and that is why we march on Labour Day. It agitated for an eight-hour day and by January 1858 the stonemasons in Queensland formed the first union. Many of them worked for John Petrie. They probably worked on this very building. Part of this building would have been built by Queensland's first unionised labour force. Why did they do that? Stonemasons in the 1850s—and this might sound familiar—said that their occupation was the most laborious kind and their 10 hours of labour each day would soon wear out the strongest of men. It was their duty and justice to themselves and their families to try, by every means in their power, to obtain shorter hours of labour. That is what those workers faced, and it is the same issue that they face today. Workers in the construction and building industry are still fighting to protect their health and their lives, and they have been doing that since 1857. It is remarkable that the latest issue to face workers in the building and construction industry would be recognised by the same stonemasons who worked on this very building—that is, problems in terms of working with stone such as silicosis.

Queensland is leading the way nationally in responding to addressing silicosis in the engineered stone industry. Since that first urgent safety warning in September 2018, we have undertaken audits of all 138 known engineered stone benchtop fabricators in Queensland. We have arranged for health screening for approximately 850 workers in the engineered stone benchtop industry which has cost an estimated \$2 million and we are developing explicit regulations which reinforce the prohibition of dry cutting of stone along with a code of practice, and that is well advanced. We have a lot to remember about what we have achieved, but we still have a lot more to do. That is why we march on Labour Day. That is why we remember Labour Day and that is why we have a Labour Day holiday as well.

The construction and building industry, which started from all of this in 1857, is still inherently dangerous. In 2018, 157 workers were killed across Australia, with many of those in construction. From March 2018 to February 2019, there were 39 confirmed workplace fatalities in Queensland. As the member for Kurwongbah said, 30 Australian workers have been killed this year. Today we have heard a bit about what the CFMMEU has done, but I point out to members opposite that this is why the building workers of the building workers' union, the CFMMEU, are constantly vigilant. They will constantly be a thorn in the side of companies that do not do the right thing. The member for Everton asked whether they were being unreasonable. Are they being unreasonable in protecting their health and protecting their lives? I think not. Every time those opposite disparage the CFMMEU, remember this: think about the men and women in construction who live their lives constantly worrying about whether they come home or if they get an injury at work or worried if their partner is going to come home. I commend this motion to the House in memory of all of those construction and building workers who have been injured or killed in the last 160 years in Queensland.