




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Record of Proceedings, 1 May 2019

MOTION

Labour Movement

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (2.32 pm): I rise to speak in strong support of the motion moved by the Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations. I am very proud to do so. After participating in the wage theft inquiry, I can say that there are few greater examples that reinforce the fact that unions have and continue to provide strong support to ensure safe and fair working conditions throughout Queensland—in fact, across Australia. As a proud member of a great union, I know that as a fact.

So many things that we take for granted and which are now enshrined in law were secured for working Australians by workers and their unions. Unions work to defend and improve conditions for all working Australians. I will refer to some of the contributions that unions have made. Paid annual leave was first won in 1936 after campaigning by the printing workers. That has been helpful. Annual leave loading of 17.5 per cent was first won by workers in the metal industry in 1973. Penalty rates is another thing that has been quite helpful.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr HEALY: I cannot hear the member; I am speaking. Penalty rates were established in 1947 when unions argued at the arbitration commission that people needed extra money for working outside of usual hours. Intensive campaigning by Australian unions for paid maternity leave ended in victory with the introduction of a paid paternal leave scheme by the Gillard Labor government. Under the scheme, working parents of children born or adopted on or after 1 January 2011 were entitled to a maximum of 18 weeks pay. That is building a fairer country.

Superannuation is an amazing thing. In an attempt to reduce the welfare state, we saw the introduction of compulsory superannuation. Prior to 1986, only a select group of workers were entitled to superannuation. Superannuation became a universal entitlement after the ACTU's national wage case. I say to the members opposite to listen and they will learn a few things. Employers had to put three per cent of workers' earnings into superannuation. That percentage later increased to nine per cent. On 2 November 2011, the ACTU and the unions' Stand Up For Super campaign celebrated another win for working Australians when the Labor government moved to increase compulsory superannuation to 12 per cent over six years from 1 July 2013 to 1 July 2019.

What about something like equal pay for women? Although there were attempts to introduce equal pay going way back as far as 1949, the principle of equal pay for women was finally adopted by the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in 1969. When members talk to people in their electorates, they hear that health and safety for workers and compensation is pretty important. That has certainly been the case for me. Workers compensation laws first came into existence in Western Australia in 1902. For many years, unions agitated and campaigned for health and safety laws that compelled employers to provide a safe working environment. In 1985 in Victoria, legislation was introduced that saw the active role of workers in maintaining safety on the job. For many years, building unions agitated to ban the use of asbestos, finally succeeding in the 1980s.

I struggle to see that some members of this chamber cannot see the effectiveness and the importance of unions. What about something like sick leave? Even though some members in this chamber are sitting here, they should be on sick leave. Before sick leave was an entitlement, people turned up for work if they were sick. If they did not turn up for work, they went without pay. Sick leave provisions began to appear in the 1920s. Over the years, unions have campaigned hard for better sick leave conditions across all industries.

I am sure that things like long service leave have been quite helpful. In 1949, coal workers went on strike over a 35-hour week and long service leave. Long service leave was finally introduced in New South Wales in 1951. Unions in other states followed. Redundancy pay, shift allowances, uniform allowances, meal breaks, rest breaks, collective bargaining, enterprise agreements, unfair dismissal—all of those entitlements have not only been fundamental in enabling workers to participate and contribute in the ever-important economic cycle but also improved the working conditions of so many Australians.

More importantly, unions have been essential to ensuring a better quality of life not just for Queenslanders but for all workers in this country. I know for some in this chamber talking about unions is a little like that scene out of Monty Python when the People's Front of Judea are having their meeting and they ask, 'What have the Romans ever done for us?' I say to the members opposite to look around.