




Speech By
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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (5.07 pm): I rise to speak on the Industrial Relations and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. There are parts of this bill that the Greens think are really important and we will be supporting this bill. Strengthening protections against workplace sexual harassment, improving conditions for independent courier drivers and updating the Industrial Relations Act to adopt gender inclusive terms are very welcome. It has been really disgusting to hear the transphobic arguments against gender inclusive language during this debate. It is a ridiculous notion that respecting people's human rights devalues any of us, including any of us who identify as women. To any trans people watching this debate, we see you, we respect you and we value you, and we hope these changes will make things a little easier for you.

It is clear from the debate so far in the chamber that this bill is rather explicitly about crushing the so-called red unions and maintaining a level of restriction on union representation via a registered organisation's framework. The red unions are no friends of Queensland workers. As others have well outlined in this chamber, they have made little to no attempt to do the things that a pro-worker union would do—organising people collectively, negotiating for better wages and conditions, and bringing people together to fight for their rights.

I am a member of the Services Union. I was a member of the NTEU for some years when I was teaching. I have been proud to join workers in solidarity in strikes and actions and Labour Day marches for many years. The union movement has showed up in solidarity for the refugee movement, for women's rights, for LGBTIQ rights and for First Nations struggles.

As tree-clearing begins today out at Deebing Creek Mission, I acknowledge the ongoing role that unions have played in standing with First Nations defenders in protecting that land, to push back against property development and to protect what is culturally and ecologically significant land, and it is shameful what is happening out there today.

I was lucky to join the ETU workers at the University of Queensland a few months ago who went on strike to fight for better pay and conditions. They gathered daily on campus, bringing workers together. They were joined by students, other university staff and the student union, and I was proud to join them for a morning. They won their fight, a reminder that working collectively and particularly withdrawing their labour and going on strike is one of the most powerful tools that workers have. Strikes work.

The Greens think the objectives of this bill could also have been achieved by restricting commercial organisations from being able to be registered as an employee organisation. For-profit commercial organisations take advantage of workers. Using union or membership dues for for-profit ventures can see workers exploited not only by their employers but also by their unions. What this government should not restrict is how and when workers can organise in their workplaces. Workers should be free to form grassroots organisations to fight for better wages, conditions and further their collective interests. We head down a dangerous path when we start to restrict the way workers can organise.

As the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union said in its submission on this bill, 'This legislation seeks to impose radically anti-union and anti-worker changes on Queensland workers.' RAFFWU was formed six years ago in response to the widespread wage theft and rights-stripping that the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association and its Labor mates presided over. In the SDA, we have an unbelievably regressive union, affiliated with the ALP, telling its often very young members that abortion is wrong, that marriage equality is wrong and that they have to accept whatever deal is cooked up by Coles and Woolies. It is no wonder that retail and fast food workers have looked elsewhere for a union that will actually defend their rights. As the RAFFWU submission points out, the SDA oversaw Australia's greatest wage theft which it imposed, with employers, across the retail and fast food sectors. Millions of workers, including many Queenslanders, had billions of dollars stripped from their wages because of SDA deals. No wonder RAFFWU's member base has grown dramatically: workers want a union that will actually represent them.

As they say, this is a fundamental failure to recognise that responsible, modern representation of workers starts with the workers' rights to freedom of association and choice of representation. The act should have been changed to enshrine those rights in a way which acknowledges not all unions will choose to be registered organisations but which, in any event, are effective union representatives. Instead, RAFFWU argues this bill doubles down on old, exclusionary, monopolistic protectionist systems which have cost Queensland workers billions of dollars.

The red unions, operating for profit and without any attempt at collective action, are no friend of Queensland workers. This debate today has laid clear how hostile the LNP are to workers organising. But what is Labor's track record on workers' rights? If Labor was a friend of workers, why would they limit the right to strike? Thanks to Labor, we have a near complete prohibition on industrial action, except during legally sanctioned bargaining periods for new enterprise agreements at individual workplaces, breaking up workers' struggles. These same laws legally protect employers who lock workers out. These laws are codified in the Commonwealth Fair Work Act 2009 from the last time Labor was in power federally. However, their origins go far back to the Hawke and Keating years and the LNP government kept these laws when they were in power because these laws are effective in constraining collective work organising.

The current industrial relations regime, whose architect is Labor, does not work for workers. While wages have stagnated and the cost of living has soared, the profit margin on labour has gone from 26 to 62 cents for every dollar paid in wages since the 1970s. Someone is benefitting from this and it is not workers. These laws make a mockery of International Labour Organisation conventions ratified by Australia.

I was interested to hear talk of the Housing Accord in federal parliament this week when I would have thought 'accord' was a dirty word. Let's not forget the Prices and Incomes Accord, a series of agreements between Labor and the Australian Council of Trade Unions where unions would moderate wage demands in exchange for other concessions from the government, and look where we are now. Wages have not risen to meet inflation as the accord promised and instead have flatlined while inflation is skyrocketing. Enterprise bargaining has split up union organising. The accord ushered in some of the biggest union defeats in Australian history, including the use of armed forces to break up the pilots' strike in 1989, and the mass sacking of SEQEB workers in Queensland in 1985.

The ETU mobilised just outside the annexe this morning saying that apprentices are living in poverty, and government departments are no longer bargaining in good faith and making substandard offers. The red unions are no friends of working Queenslanders, neither is the LNP and neither is Labor.