




Speech By
Joseph Kelly

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (4.01 pm): I have been looking forward to speaking on this debate. Going back a good 12 to 15 years was when I first encountered a gentleman from the QPSU who was a disgruntled prison officer who set up his own scab union and caused immense damage to the interests of the members of the QPSU. What was he doing? Nothing more than pretending to be a union when in fact all he was doing was trying to tout for business for a back-end law firm. It was disgraceful then and it continues to be disgraceful to this day.

Yesterday the member for Southern Downs accused the Palaszczuk government of being scrofulous in bringing this bill. Do members know what I think is scrofulous? I think it is scrofulous that the LNP has found yet another sneaky, underhanded, scrofulous way to try to destroy the vehicles that working people use to empower themselves and improve not just their workplaces but society generally. However, we should not be surprised because the LNP and its various predecessors have been doing this for hundreds of years.

First, it accused workers who spoke to one another about wanting more money to feed their kids or perhaps not even having their kids working in a factory next to them and getting an education. Those people were accused and convicted of conspiracy. They were put on boats and sent to none other than Australia. That continued on down through the 1890s with all of the tools of state repression being used on behalf of the ruling class to suppress the legitimate rights of workers to organise and represent themselves. Perhaps because there were so many Labor rats in the ranks of the United Australia Party in the 1930s we seemed to go through a period of relative detente where unions seemed to be respected. Perhaps it was the contribution they made at various points during world wars. That seemed to last for a long time federally, but then of course enter Howard, Reith, Costello and their great mates from the HR Nicholls Society and all of that ended and it was back to war on the wharves.

Then came the hated WorkChoices, and the union movement was backed by Australians at large to throw out this ridiculous nonsense and the ridiculous government responsible, including the then prime minister who lost his seat—

Mr Whiting interjected.

Mr KELLY:—for the first time in Australian history since Stanley Bruce pulled off the exact same trick in the 1930s, and I thank the historian for his interjection. Here in Queensland our very own ‘Don’t you worry about that’ tin-pot dictator tried to break the mighty ETU, and didn’t that work out well? Then we had the hated era of the Newman government where, try as it might, it could not stop working people standing up for their rights. Remember, it tried to get us all to stop wearing badges. We were not allowed to wear our union badges. It harks back to the 1912 tram strike. There was the exact same issue at the start and it has been going on for hundreds of years, so I ask the House: when is the LNP going to learn that working people have a right to organise and be represented, and Labor will back this? No matter what sneaky, underhanded, scrofulous methods those opposite come up with, we will be waiting to ensure that workers’ rights are protected.

Some 34 years ago when I was leaving home and about to jump on a train to Brisbane to start my nursing training my father gave me some advice. He said, 'When you start work, find a union delegate and join the union. You might not really understand what they do, but they really can help you out a lot.' My dad was no rabid trade unionist. He was a member of the Independent Teachers Union until he reached the lofty heights of principal and he had to leave, but neither he nor mum spent much time discussing unions or politics at home. However, they were both very committed to Catholic social justice and they obviously knew how vulnerable an 18-year-old kid entering the workplace 1,600 kilometres from home could be and they knew the protections that a trade union could offer in that circumstance. I took that advice. It was pretty easy advice to take, because on day one the Queensland nurses union visited our workplace and signed us up.

Since that time I have learned a lot about workers, unions and industrial relations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the rights of workers to form and join a union. The minister in her second reading speech outlined the approach of the government to the ILO's 'conveniently belong' rule. We know from the bitter lessons of history that when workers form rival organisations it is bad for everybody involved—workers, employers and society. No matter how much the opposition might try to pretend this is the case, applying this rule is not unique in Queensland; it is rolled out in industrial relations jurisdictions right around the globe. It is rolled out to afford workers protections, it is rolled out to afford employers protections and it is rolled out to afford society at large protections. It is a feature of sensible, moderate unionism, and the Australian union movement has never strayed to the far right or the far left as has happened in other countries. It has remained committed to achieving outcomes sensibly, preferably through dialogue and by participating in parliamentary democracy which we do to this day. Our movement has never been interested in destroying businesses or wrecking democratic institutions. As we all know, there have been those who have attempted this in the past, but they have been resisted inside our movement, sometimes at great cost.

These so-called professional associations are not unions. First, unions consist of workers freely associating to further their collective interests. These organisations are effectively privately owned entities set up ultimately for the private profit of Graeme Haycroft and his mates.

Second, unions are democratic, transparent and accountable. I would urge members to re-read the speeches given by the member for Redlands and the member for Stafford if they want to delve into the murky world of these non-transparent, non-democratic organisations which are effectively a business model for a couple of dodgy lawyers.

Third, the purpose of unions is solely to empower and support workers. These organisations exist to make some people rich and to destroy unions and the ALP. How do I know this? Because one of the senior leaders in one of these dodgy operations told me this. Thankfully, the now former member for Gaven Sid Cramp told me this in a maxi taxi on a trip we did to Cairns for a parliamentary committee. He announced proudly to our entire committee when he was foreseeing the future that if he lost the election—thank God he did—he would go back to pursue his passion. Was that being a paramedic? Was that helping people? No. His passion was working with his organisation to destroy unions and to destroy the ALP—really uplifting stuff.

I feel really sorry for the workers who get deceived into joining these organisations. Those workers are just trying to fix problems in their workplaces, just like I was trying to do all those years ago and continue to do. Sadly, they encounter these charlatans who pretend to care about what they care about when really they have a whole other agenda. The Leader of the Opposition posed a question in his contribution about choice. I have been a worker who had to make choices in lots of different scenarios in lots of different workplaces over a 25-year period before I was elected.

Ms Grace: They can choose to join or not to join.

Mr KELLY: I could have chosen not to join a union. That is right; I take that interjection. I could have chosen to start a ginger group and run around causing problems, but instead I made a choice to get active in my union, to get educated and to put myself forward for election as a delegate. I chose to fix things that I was unhappy about. It was not easy and sometimes I had to come to the really tough realisation that the things I thought were wrong and I did not like were actually supported by a majority of my union colleagues, and I had to accept that as the collective will of the organisation.

Whatever sneaky, underhanded mechanisms those opposite come up with to try to smash unions, the Labor Party will be there, supported by our good friends in the union movement, resisting those scrofulous attempts, always working to empower and advance workers and to advance all Queenslanders.

I want to spend my last few moments in this debate responding to comments made by members opposite. The member for Theodore claimed that the QNMU is a Labor affiliated union. I can tell the member for Theodore that I wish it was. In the early nineties when they had a vote about whether they

should stay in the ALP or move out of the ALP, I was out there campaigning for them to stay. Unfortunately, I lost that debate and the nurses' union left the Labor Party at that time. That was a completely misleading statement by the member for Theodore.

In his contribution the member for Kawana stated, 'The nurses' union put out a flyer saying "We support Labor's plan to fix aged care."' What do they support? A plan to fix aged care! I read their journal every month. They would happily write any other political party's name in there if they had plan to fix aged care. Just like they would have backed those opposite if they were prepared to back ratios.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr KELLY: Those opposite do not like to hear it. The QNMU is a non-affiliated union. It is a union that first and foremost puts the interests of nurses, midwives and patients at the forefront.