




Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2022

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (4.31 pm): This bill and this government are against workers, equality and our great democracy. The Industrial Relations and Other Legislation Amendment Bill before us has been innocuously named. It covers a lot of ground. There are amendments within this bill that relate to workplace sexual harassment which are admirable, but there are many more reminiscent of the 1950s. It reeks of hypocrisy and self-interest and cannot in good conscience be passed. This bill is a slap in the face to workers right across the state. It is nothing more than a bill to further entrench Labor aligned union monopoly in Queensland and to take away choices for teachers, nurses and frontline workers. It is draconian, antiquated and flies in the face of our democracy.

What more can we expect from a government that is driven by pure politics, power-hungry ministers and a hate for competition? In introducing this bill, the Minister for Industrial Relations spoke about the five-year review of the Queensland Industrial Relations Act 2016. The minister was adamant and seemed especially proud to claim that the view is independent. What a farce. It just so happens that this independent review was conducted by a former Labor Party attorney-general who we know is heavily involved with the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union. Just to cement this bias, it was co-led by a former union official. There is absolutely no independence in this report.

We cannot have an independent review if a former member of the Labor Party, a puppet master union boss, is leading the review. The minister may also be surprised to know that we cannot have an independent review when that review is not advertised, open for submissions from affected stakeholders and not open for public consultation.

An honourable member: It is not really a review.

Mrs GERBER: It is not really a review. The minister has deceived Queenslanders. Her trickery cannot be allowed to pass through this House. We were told that this bill seeks to strengthen protections against sexual harassment in the workplace. Yes, an objective of this bill is that one does not sexually harass a workplace officer. The inclusion of this important issue is hiding some truly draconian amendments and this subterfuge is appalling. What makes matters worse is that the minister has made this protective objective in name only. There are no punishments included in the bill for someone who sexually harasses a workplace person. If the minister were serious about this crucial issue, she would have moved a separate bill so some bipartisan debate could occur—not used the very real and very concerning issue of sexual harassment to shield amendments to further entrench Labor aligned union monopoly in Queensland. It is truly disgraceful behaviour. Queenslanders deserve so much better. When introducing this bill the Minister for Industrial Relations said—

The bill clarifies the rights and protections conferred upon registered industrial organisations and provides that such rights are limited to organisations which are registered or otherwise eligible for taking steps towards registration under the IR Act.

This bill goes so much further than that. It goes so much further than simply clarifying the ability of such groups to represent and protect workers; it attacks our very democracy by seeking to outlaw those employee organisations that do not support the Australian Labor Party. In the words of the minister, they are rogue entities. I repeat that: it seeks to outlaw those unions that do not support the

Australian Labor Party. This means non-ALP aligned employee organisations, or red unions, would not be able to represent workers in industrial relations matters. This is completely and utterly disgraceful. It is an affront to our democracy and it should not be allowed to stand.

In a submission to the Education, Employment and Training Committee, the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union wrote—

The Bill seeks to put beyond any doubt that representatives of workers, including genuine unions, that are not registered as 'registered organisations' cannot represent workers under the IR Act and goes further to impose penalties on those which mistakenly or otherwise represent that they can or do ...

The Retail and Fast Food Workers Union goes on to say—

In doing so, the legislation seeks to impose radically anti-union and anti-worker changes on Queenslanders.

The managing director of the Red Union Support Hub, Jack McGuire, echoes this sentiment on behalf of the Nurses' Professional Association of Queensland, the Teachers' Professional Association of Queensland, the Professional Drivers' Association of Australia, the Australian Medical Professionals' Society, the Sworn Officers' Professional Association of Australia and the Independent Workers' Union of Australia. In his opening statement to the committee he stated—

Over 17,000 workers are under attack under this bill. Hundreds of thousands of workers in Queensland are having their rights to choose their representative taken away from them and their human rights stomped on ... This is the most anti-worker bill ever introduced into this Parliament and if any members here got elected off the back of the worker, they should be ashamed that a supposed Labor government would even draft this bill. It makes a mockery of Gough Whitlam. What this bill hopes to do is shut down independent unions—unions that dissent against the government.

This bill tears away protections that hundreds of thousands of Queensland workers rely on, leaving them stranded. Queenslanders deserve a choice in what industrial association they want to represent them. The Red Union Support Hub in July this year had almost 1,000 matters listed before the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. Currently, the Red Union Support Hub can and does represent workers. Under this bill, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission will only acknowledge one professional association per specific profession. It will ensure a monopoly of Labor aligned unions on industrial relations and remove the individual's right of association, forcing many workers to inevitably join or in some case re-join Labor aligned unions.

To make matters worse—as if it could even get worse—I can think of at least once Labor aligned union that consistently uses antisocial behaviour and storms government buildings. On 23 August this year, public servants were put at risk. A government building was forced into lockdown and events were cancelled after hundreds of militant union members from the CFMEU stormed a building on Mary Street just two streets up from here. That behaviour was disgraceful, yet it is endorsed by this bill. The saga continued when just last Friday Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk told the media that she would not cut financial ties nor instruct her Labor HQ to hand back the \$90,000 received in donations from the CFMEU this year.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): The members for Kurwongbah and Kawana will cease their quarrelling across the chamber.

Mrs GERBER: By limiting workers' ability to choose an independent union this bill is removing the option for workers right across Queensland to join a union that does not donate money to the Labor Party or provide election support to the Labor Party. This is blatant gerrymandering of our democracy. I cannot believe that in 2022 we are being presented with such regressive, power-hungry legislation. In fact, I urge the minister to come to Currumbin to meet with our local teachers, nurses and frontline workers face-to-face and be completely up-front with them and tell them exactly how much of their union fees are being funnelled back into the Labor Party to support re-election.

We have looked at the membership fees associated with joining the Queensland Teachers' Union and the Nurses and Midwives' Union. It is a staggering \$400 more than what it actually costs to provide a core service. This is being funnelled back into the Labor Party. These Labor affiliated unions have abandoned their values. They are not acting in the best interests of their members. They are taking the hard-earned money of their members—our teachers and frontline workers—and funneling it back into the Labor Party. I urge the minister to come to Currumbin and tell our hardworking teachers, nurses, other frontline workers and anyone else who is a member of a Labor affiliated union exactly where their money is going. I guarantee you, they would be horrified.

This bill serves only one purpose: to use the money of hardworking Queenslanders to line the pockets of the Palaszczuk government. This is a government that needs union support. This will ensure that they continue to get elected off the back of unions. This Palaszczuk government is controlled by the unions. Time and time again we see that this government is only interested in big unions and big governments. This bill says exactly that. This bill takes away the rights and choices of workers in this country and it is utterly disgraceful.