




Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Furner**

**MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE**

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Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2022

### **INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (6.25 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Industrial Relations and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. A clear and effective system of industrial representation is a vital part of making sure that the interests of Queensland working women and men are protected. Unions have long been recognised by Queensland law for their particular role in fighting for the rights of Queenslanders.

I am a proud union member and a proud member of the Australian Labor Party—a party that has its origins in the union movement and a party that still shares union ideals of equality and equity, of a fair go and for workers reaping rightful compensation for their work. As a union representative I have fought for the rights of police officers. I have fought for the rights of truck drivers. I have fought for the rights of workers at Golden Circle who, coincidentally, cherish their 75th anniversary tomorrow. I have worked for all kinds of union workers. I have fought for fair pay, for penalty rates and for fair workers compensation and lifesaving safety conditions.

What do we hear about unions from those opposite? We hear the constant deriding of unions and union members. There are constant attacks on the unions that protect the safety of building and construction workers. There are constant attacks on the unions that stop truck drivers being forced to drive for dangerously long hours. There are constant attacks on the unions that stand up for the heroes of the COVID-19 pandemic—the nurses, midwives and other health and hospital workers.

It was only this morning that members of parliament in this chamber during question time heard the member for Mudgeeraba describe health workers in the regions as duds. That is a scurrilous attack on health workers in the regions. That is something that should be dismissed. That is something that should be apologised for.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Lister): You know I am not in the business of preventing interjections but that was over the top.

**Mr FURNER:** The member for Mudgeeraba has the opportunity to come in here tonight and apologise for the scurrilous attack on health workers in our regions, referencing them as duds. What a disgraceful attack on our health workers who have been saving Queenslanders' lives for the last several years.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members, I will commence warning members if the interjections continue in that fashion.

**Mr FURNER:** Those opposite may try and slur our brave health workers, our union workers, our workers across the wonderful state of Queensland every single time but they have not once been ashamed to be a member of a union. When the LNP attack unions they are attacking people who dare to think that workers deserve a standard of living.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Pause the clock. Minister, would you please resume your seat. I do not prohibit interjections, but cross-chamber quarrels are not to be borne. I want to be able to hear the minister uninterrupted. Minister, please continue.

**Mr FURNER:** Thank you for your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker. When the LNP attacks unions they are attacking people who dare to think that workers deserve a standard of living, deserve to be safe and deserve proper conditions of work. Then, at the height of LNP hypocrisy, they get their LNP mates to set up fake unions in an attempt to deceive workers that they are on the side of workers.

They set up a fake nurses union. The member for Mudgeeraba has been singing their praises. That organisation came out against COVID-19 vaccinations. At the very time the Palaszczuk government was saving thousands of lives by urging as many Queenslanders as possible to get vaccinated, there was the LNP and the anti-vax union trying to recruit members.

This bill makes clear the distinction between organisations that are registered under the IR Act and represent the industrial interests of employers and employees and other entities that are not registered under the IR Act and cannot properly represent workers' industrial interests in the state's IR tribunal and collective bargaining. Organisations properly registered under the IR Act are subject to a range of stringent accountability and transparency obligations. This means their members can have confidence about the exercise of their representation rights in industrial matters.

Registered organisations have rigorous reporting requirements under the IR Act, and they should. It is for the protection of their members' interests as well. Unregistered associations do not face the same level of accountability and reporting and therefore should not be able to misrepresent their status to their so-called members. This bill makes clear that any misrepresentation will be subject to penalties, and so it should. If you listened to the LNP, you would have to wonder what genuine unions have ever done for Queenslanders. Let me tell the House what unions have done.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr FURNER:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I take offence to the disgraceful comments of the member for Kawana and I ask him to withdraw.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Lister): Everybody will remain silent. I am going to take some advice. Member for Kawana, it would assist the House if you would state whether or not you made an offensive remark to the member for Ferny Grove. If so, would you withdraw?

**Mr BLEIJIE:** It was to the Attorney but in reference to the member for Ferny Grove. I withdraw.

**Mr FURNER:** Unions have provided eight-hour working days, annual leave, sick leave, long service leave, maternity leave, health and safety requirements—think about protective clothing and equipment—domestic leave, superannuation and the list goes on and on. Every single one of these life-changing vital reforms has been brought forward and won by real unions properly representing the interests of their members. This is a legacy that all of us on this side of the House, members of the Australian Labor Party, are extremely proud of. If you trace the history of industrial relations, you will see that time and time again at a change of government, whether it be a change from Labor to the LNP, there is a change in industrial relations. That is what we are doing here today: we are correcting the record. We are correcting the entitlements of workers.

I turn to a key focus of the IR Act review, which is to provide protections for workers subject to sexual harassment. This is a fundamental amendment to bring about measures to prevent sexual harassment in our workplaces. The bill amends the definition of misconduct for the purpose of dismissal, which will include sexual harassment. Should this occur, this change would send a clear message to perpetrators that this conduct is unacceptable and could lead to dismissal. In my lifetime I have represented many female workers who have been sexually harassed. It has been my pride and joy to represent those members, sometimes against other members. But it is the right thing to do, and it is the right thing to make sure it is enshrined in legislation to protect women in workplaces against perpetrators of sexual harassment.

In conclusion, I want to reference a comment made this evening by the member for Nanango. She made the false claim that union fees go back to the Labor Party because of their affiliation. What about the Queensland Police Union of Employees? They have never been affiliated with the Australian Labor Party. Their fees do not go back to the Australian Labor Party. They are a recognised, proud union that I have had the privilege to work for. I have represented police in the Industrial Relations Commission, the Workers' Compensation Tribunal and in workplace health and safety matters. To come in here and make false statements demonstrates the insincerity and lack of credibility of the Liberal National Party. They come in here and make false comments. They are not affiliated with the Labor Party. In fact, the QPUE has been successful of late suing the Sworn Officers' Professional Association of Australia.

These Ponzi schemes, which are unregistered organisations, are not subject to the rigorous and transparent registration and reporting requirements that registered union and employer organisations are subject to. There are clear differences between real unions and these fake Ponzi schemes. They seek to undermine collectivism and what they do is the very opposite to unionism. Real unions focus on organising and fighting for members and improving the communities in which they live and work. I am very proud to represent the Australian Labor Party and the Palaszczuk government. I commend this bill to the House. We support workers, unlike those opposite.