



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KURWONGBAH

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KING** (Kurwongbah—ALP) (7.19 pm): I rise today as a proud member of this parliament and of the mighty Electrical Trades Union—a union that does represent workers and has represented me for most of my working life and will continue to do so. I rise to contribute to this debate on the Industrial Relations and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I want to start by expressing thanks to my friend and colleague Linda Lavarch. Linda is a legend in my part of the world, and in many others I am sure, as a former member for Kurwongbah and former Queensland attorney-general, among other accolades. Linda is also the co-author, with former Queensland industrial relations commissioner John Thompson, of the five-year review of the Queensland Industrial Relations Act 2016. I thank them both for that body of work.

Their report and our government's response was released in February this year and I am pleased to say that we have accepted all of the review's recommendations—36 in full and four in principle—which has led us here today to a bill that will strengthen the protection of workers covered by Queensland's Industrial Relations Act by bringing our employment standards into line with the equivalent National Employment Standards under the Fair Work Act. This bill will also update our collective bargaining framework in Queensland and better protect and empower independent courier drivers in our state. I have heard a lot about courier drivers from all members. I use them a lot, too, but mostly to get car parts. I want to make sure that they get a fair go and get paid properly. Importantly, this is a bill that will clear up any confusion about who can legitimately represent workers in Queensland's industrial relations court. There is clearly a lot of confusion on the other side of the chamber about this, so I will be focusing on that today.

I want to start by saying that we are not changing the laws around registered organisations that operate under the Industrial Relations Act, that is, trade unions—organisations that can lawfully exercise a right of entry and represent workers in industrial matters that come before the Queensland industrial relations court and organisations that are subject to regulatory requirements to ensure accountability and transparency. None of that will change. What is the difference between real trade unions and red unions? For starters, the business-like model of the red unions means they are not compelled to explain where membership fees go. They do not have to be clear about their business structure—and they are not. It seems they do not even have to be sure who their secretaries and treasurers are. It is hard work keeping up with all the different names they have called themselves over the years, as has been highlighted by the member for Redlands and others with that document. It looked like a spider web to me. It was pretty scary.

As I have said in this parliament before, collectivism has been around since records began. We have heard a lot of people talking about the history of unions, but I have previously mentioned that I think that the biblical figure Moses took the first union action in having his people withdraw their labour and leave the worksite, so that goes back a long way. Collectivism is taking action to achieve better working conditions for workers. Before we had unions, we had friendly societies made up of workers coming together for support, to protect each other and to push for change. They were recognised in the

UK parliament in the 1800s. In Australia we can also trace back the origins of unions to the early 1800s. This is a movement that has over decades fought and won the eight-hour working day, minimum wages and conditions, equal pay and superannuation, among other great achievements.

It was our unions that fought against the dangers of asbestos and to later get compensation for affected workers. I remember a former prime minister talking about Bernie Banton, a dying man, and saying that he was not honest. That was despicable. It was our unions that fought for entitlements to be paid to Ansett workers when the airline collapsed. It was our unions that fought against WorkChoices through the 'Your Rights at Work' campaign. I do not have time to mention the myriad ways in which the old ruling classes, oppressive employers, business associations and governments seeking to protect the interests of these groups have tried to thwart the advancement of Australian workers over the years. Slavery to mass sackings and sabotaging collective bargaining conventions are just a couple of examples. In the case of the International Longshoremen I met in America, they shot them. They called it Bloody Thursday. They shot them for taking action. If that is offensive, I withdraw.

I am proud to stand here today as a member of the mighty Electrical Trades Union—a real union registered in Queensland in 1917. I am an electrician by trade—no-one knows that, so it must be a surprise to all—and I would hope that members opposite care about the safety of electricians like I do. I have heard some disgusting remarks from those opposite about my union over the time I have been in here and I sometimes wonder if they really care about electricians, and I have feelings too.

Mr Bleijie: Oh, come on! I'll give you a hug! I'll get up and hug you!

Mr KING: I will take that interjection from the member for Kawana and decline his offer. I am proud to speak to this bill which addresses the newest way the anti-union movement has found to undermine worker protections by creating fake unions. To be a union in Queensland—that is, a registered industrial association—representing employees or employers, you must apply to the Industrial Relations Commission for registration and meet certain conditions, including that the association seeking registration is not competing with an existing registered organisation to which relevant workers may conveniently belong.

The so-called red unions—and we know who I am talking about—do not meet this test as they seek to draw away workers from the 'conveniently belong' rule. They seek to draw workers away from the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union of Employees registered in 1921, the Teachers' Union of Employees registered in 1917 and the Independent Education Union registered in 1980. Unions are about bringing workers together to get better outcomes and protections and our IR system is about maintaining industrial harmony. We are not about divisiveness and competitiveness as we have seen from the red unions and members will not hear any of the unions that I have mentioned refer to health workers as 'duds'.

Unions grow from the ground up while the red unions are more reminiscent of Pauline Hanson and Clive Palmer's style—get a few people together, call yourself a political party, or in this case a union, and then go touting for members. Unions are about representing workers and informing them about their rights, not tricking them into believing that they are protected as we have seen from the red unions. I want to quote from the NPAQ website—

The Nurses' Professional Association of Queensland is an employee union which fights to protect you, not promote a political party ... Every membership dollar supports you, your workplace issues, provides professional indemnity insurance and legal backup for you. You get a better service for half the price.

This is dangerously misleading, which was proved last year when NPAQ could not represent its own member in the Queensland industrial relations court because it was not a union. It says it can, but it cannot. In fact, the QIRC in Vice-President O'Connor's decision found—

In my view the NPAQ is not a 'trade union'. NPAQ's legal personality and corporate status are inconsistent with that of a typical 'trade union' and its history is not in any sense typical of a 'trade union'.

To claim it is not political—oh please! Come on! These fake unions have done little else but attack our government since their formation. In my opinion, you could play five degrees or less of separation between the LNP and the executive members of these so-called red unions. For all that I have heard during this debate about Labor and the unions being together, the unions formed the Labor Party. No-one makes any secret of that. In fact, I will say this to some of those opposite who seem to be mystified by that: go to the electorate of Gregory and have a look through with the member for Gregory because he explained the history of the Labor Party and the unions. He seems to get it. The LNP opposition should caucus and get its story straight on the history of Labor and the unions.

I am very supportive of the introduction of penalties for the misrepresentation of an organisation's registration status under the Industrial Relations Act. I support the proposed review mechanism under the Associations Incorporation Act to ensure applications for incorporation are not granted if it is

reasonable to believe that the association could then be mistaken for an organisation under the IR Act. It is a shame when we have to spend time clarifying laws for the small percentage of people who do the wrong thing, yet here we are. I am all about accountability. I am all about protecting workers. I 100 per cent support real trade unions and always will. That is why I am voting for this bill. I commend this bill to the House.