



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Trade Unions

SPEECH

Monday, 20 March 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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<p>Date Monday, 20 March 2017 Page 135 Questioner Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (13:15): Just to correct the record, I want to pay tribute to the member for Wide Bay who put forward this motion today. I am the member for Fairfax. What a great member the member for Wide Bay is and the other speaker here today, who just spoke, the member for Fisher. Not only are these two gentlemen such wonderful advocates for the region of the Sunshine Coast but the first is a former police officer and the second is a former construction barrister—two men who know more about this topic than anybody in the opposition, as well demonstrated by the speakers opposite thus far.

The member who has just left the House very proudly said that Labor always believes in the rule of law. Match that with the other speaker who proudly said, 'I'm a proud unionist. I am very proud to be a unionist.' Only last week, Sally McManus, the new ACTU secretary, made very clear that she does not see any problem with breaking the rule of law. Leigh Sales on 7.30 said to Sally McManus:

Yet nonetheless, we live in a country where there are laws that are established by a parliament that all citizens are expected to abide by. So, regardless of whether you agree or disagree with those laws, you said that you believe in the rule of law?

Sally McManus said:

Yeah, I believe in the rule of law where the law is fair, when the law is right. But when it's unjust, I don't think there's a problem with breaking it.

That is the problem with the modern union movement and that is the problem with today's Labor Party.

I agree with the earlier speaker's very proud historical narrative of the union movement in Australia and I believe that the union movement should be proud of their past. What they should be dreadfully ashamed of is their present. What they should be ashamed of is that the very party that purports to represent workers is undermining workers. What they should be ashamed of is the fact that today's union movement defies the rule of law. It is not just one or two people who are a pox on the Labor movement. It is their fundamental business model. It is the way they do business, and that is the inherent problem of the union movement today. Having listened to the last speaker, I thought I had better look up the Labor Party website. You will be happy to know that it has a heading saying:

We'll put people first. Standing up for middle class and working class people.

What absolute rot. The suggestion by the first speaker was that the coalition government does not look after workers. Indeed we do, and that is what the ABCC was all about. Later this week we will have a debate in the House about a fair work amendment protecting vulnerable workers. That is the coalition government going into bat for the very people the Labor Party and the unions pretend they want to represent.

As the member for Fisher outlined, we in the state of Queensland have been victim particularly to the CFMEU. Queensland and Victoria almost compete, it seems, at the CFMEU level to see who can break the most laws. Three out of four issues in the sector attracting the commissioner's attention are in either Victoria or Queensland. Lady Cilento Children's Hospital was hit by the CFMEU; the Gold Coast University Hospital was hit; the Brisbane Supreme Court project was hit; the Queensland Institute of Medical Research project was hit; and something that is close to us three members is the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, and it was hit by the CFMEU.

At the end of the day, the Trade Union Joint Police Taskforce was established to start looking at these very problems. They were investigating 34 referrals, and what has the Labor state government in Queensland done? They have withdrawn participation in that task force, leaving vulnerable workers without any safety whatsoever. Let me give some gratuitous advice to the members opposite: when they next go to their website, their big banner should read, 'We'll put unions first, throwing middle-class and working-class people under the bus.' It is a disgrace and the union movement needs to be fixed.