



Speech by

Rachel Nolan

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Hansard Thursday, 21 October 2004

UNIONISM

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (7.23 p.m.): Few Queenslanders would know that compulsory unionism in the cane fields, in piggeries, on dairies and on fruit and vegetable properties, as well as on trawlers, long outlived compulsory unionism on the factory floor, the shearing shed or the waterfront. The reason Australians would not know is because over decades Australia's Liberal and National parties have misrepresented their views on unionism in this country. This Labor government supports people's ability to join a union. It is a pity the other side of politics is not so honest.

During the recent federal election campaign the Howard government wheeled out a union scare campaign rivalled only by its lies on interest rates. The fact is that the Howard government used the union scare campaign selectively. It was quite happy to use a discredited study into Labor's Medicare Gold policy that was commissioned by the Australian Medical Association or, as Patrick Cook calls them, the painters and doctors—arguably the country's most powerful union and closed shop.

We know that the AMA is headed nationally by Dr Bill Glasson junior, the son of a former Bjelke-Petersen minister. We know that the immediate past president of the AMA in Queensland ran unsuccessfully for the federal seat of Brisbane for the Liberals. We also know that the federal Education Minister, Dr Brendan Nelson, was also a former president of the AMA. Last weekend the AMA confirmed that it had recommended its members increase their fees. Did the Howard government condemn them? No. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's criticisms of Labor's industrial relations policy were also used by the Howard government, but we need to know that the ACCI's spokesman, Peter Hendy, is a former advisor to former Liberal workplace relations minister Peter Reith.

It is ironic that in the speculation after the election Queensland Liberal MP Ian Macfarlane has been tipped to move from industry to workplace relations. Macfarlane is a celebrated ex-union leader. He led the Queensland Grain Growers Association in the 1990s. Federal agriculture minister Warren Truss has a strong background in farm unionism through the now defunct QGGA. The member for Maranoa, Bruce Scott, was a senior member of the United Graziers Association, acting as its head in the three years before he came into federal parliament. Similarly, the National Party member for the New South Wales federal seat of Parkes, John Cobb, was the president of the New South Wales Farmers Association from 1998 until 2001. Former Liberal Party director Andrew Robb has now gone into parliament. He was an executive director of the NFF in the 1980s. Don McGauche, the man the Liberals have appointed to the chair of Telstra, has flagged his interest in running for the Liberal Party, and the current president of the NFF, Peter Corish, has also said he is interested in politics—no doubt on the conservative side. One of the NFF's most prominent leaders, Ian McLachlan, was defence minister in the first Howard government.

The Liberal and National parties have strong links with the union movement, yet they lie about it and they attack unions. The Labor Party is the only party in Australian politics that has a genuine and honest position on unionism in Australia.