Extract from *Hansard*
[COUNCIL — Thursday, 13 May 2021]
p539a-545a
Hon Laurie Graham; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Matthew Swinbourn; Hon Darren West

1946 PILBARA STRIKE

Motion

HON LAURIE GRAHAM (Agricultural) [11.30 am] — without notice: I move —

> That this house recognises and celebrates the courage and determination of the Pilbara Aboriginal station workers, who, 75 years ago, took a stand for justice and commenced Australia's longest strike. We acknowledge their actions became an inspiration for a generation of Australians and an important milestone in the march to equality.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to move this motion. It is something I did not expect. Like others who have spoken here today, we thought we had made our valedictory speeches and we were gone.

Hon Simon O'Brien: There's plenty of miles left in you, my friend.

Hon LAURIE GRAHAM: There are not too many—not in these sorts of forums anyway! I think I will go back to my rightful place.

When the opportunity came, I was glad that members of my party gave me the opportunity to move a motion in private members' business today. It is appropriate because the question was asked whether one needed to be alive at the time to talk about these matters. I just happened to be alive when this occurred—I might have been in the cradle, but I was around at that stage.

In 1946, 800 Aboriginal pastoral workers from 27 stations in Western Australia walked off the job. They did it for better pay and conditions. The background and build-up to that strike make it an amazing story. It was the first industrial action by Aboriginal people since colonisation in 1788 and predated the famous Wave Hill strike in the Northern Territory by 20 years. The Pilbara strike lasted until 1949, making it the longest strike in Australia's history. From the 1890s to the 1920s it was common for Aboriginal workers to be paid in rations of food and clothing without receiving any financial remuneration. During the 1920s some workers began to receive minimum wages. The Native Administration Act 1936 legally compelled pastoralists to provide shelter and meet the medical needs of their workers, but sadly that was rarely enforced by government.

Generally, Aboriginal stockmen were housed in corrugated iron humpies. Perhaps one could say that was an improvement on some of the other conditions they lived in if they did not live inside those stations. However, they did not have any sanitation, furniture or cooking facilities. It was illegal for Aboriginal people to leave their place of employment, even if they were not being paid. It was even illegal to pay them wages equal to a white man's wage, which is something I found astounding when reading about the background of the strike. I thought they would at least be paid a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. I was surprised when researching this matter to find out that that was illegal.

In 1942 a secret Aboriginal law meeting was held to discuss a proposed strike, an idea first discussed by white labourer and prospector Don McLeod and Aboriginal people Clancy McKenna, Dooley Bin Bin and elder Peter "Kangushot" Coppin from the Pilbara community. They were instrumental in calling together the 1942 meeting. Two hundred lawmen from 23 Aboriginal groups met on that occasion. After a fair period of negotiation, they decided they would go on strike on 1 May that year. However, because of other factors, including the Second World War, it was decided to hold off on that decision. It was 1 May 1946 before the strike was called. Obviously, the significance of 1 May is that it is the date that shearing season commenced and it would put maximum pressure on the squatters. As I said, the strike was postponed from the original date, and obviously it is now history that it happened a little later.

There were no phones or radios on the stations and Aboriginal workers could not read or write English; therefore, they had to find a way to manage the decision that was made to go on strike, but it had to happen on the same day some years later. The date always had to be 1 May, so they had elaborate calendars, by today's standards, drawn up. Dooley, one of the instigators, was responsible for spreading the word of the strike and setting up a system for the workers to know when 1 May was approaching and when the strike would occur.

The strike began on 1 May 1946, at the beginning of shearing season, when the pastoralists were most vulnerable to the loss of Aboriginal workers. Hundreds of workers left the 20 stations. In those days the work was a lot more manual than it is today. Hundreds of people were employed compared with a handful who would do the same job today. The strike affected 10 000 square kilometres of sheep farming country. They gathered at strike camps outside Port Hedland and Marble Bar, where they would spend much of the following three years. At its height, at least 800 people were on strike. The sheep stations were paralysed without the Aboriginal labour.

In order to survive, the strikers coordinated a collection of bush food and pearl shells and hunted kangaroos and goats to sell the skins. Many Aboriginal people got their first taste of economic independence. However, many Aboriginal strikers were jailed for their participation. Things are very different today. One would have to do something pretty drastic at a strike to be jailed. Some were even put in chains for several days.

In 1949 the stockmen won award rates. Many did not return to the stations and instead earned their own money and found new economic independence. Measured against the workers' initial demands, the three-year strike was not a complete victory, but it was of great historical significance. It provided a powerful example of the Aboriginal people's resolve to struggle against slave-like conditions. Many similar instances happened over the years. I am from a port background and people saw me as someone who perhaps did not support the strike action of ports. However, I have always believed that it is important that people have the right to democracy and to be able to withdraw their labour if they do not believe the circumstances are right.

It was regular for shipowners to offer workers incentives. From the early days, they would complain all the time about the rate of pay on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. *The Onedin Line* dramatized this time. I would watch the workers, who were paid so much a bag, running up the gangways and falling off. I suppose it was a representation of a time when the concept of strikes and people's right to withdraw their labour was emerging. In later years, shipowners and others were happy to pay exorbitant rates to keep their ships moving. I see a parallel between the maritime industry and the shearers strike 75 years ago. It is ironic that in today's environment people are back at the lower end of the wage scale. No doubt, when unemployment gets to very low levels, perhaps we will see a return to more normal wages for most people.

As a result of that strike, some people were able to save enough money to buy a share in a property, and a number were successfully operated. I know that there is discussion from time to time that some Aboriginal-run stations are run poorly. However, a large number were successful. But they were never really recognised in those early years; they were just seen as pastoral stations.

There were European attacks on, and brutal shootings of, whole family groups of Aboriginal Australians. It is a part of the history of the region. Those things should not have happened. Aboriginal lawmen sought justice and proper wages and working conditions for Aboriginal people under the original Western Australian colonial constitution. On that note, Mr Acting President, I would like to close my remarks to allow others to make a contribution.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [11.41 am]: I am a very enthusiastic supporter of this motion. I first became aware of this strike in the early eighties, when I was working for the commonwealth in Aboriginal employment across the state. At the time I came across, I think, three Don McLeods in the Pilbara and the Kimberley who still had a presence there. I had to try to sort out which Don McLeod was which. Of course, I came to know this incredible story about the walkout at Strelley station and the great Pilbara strike of the 1940s. It really resonated with me because I was a schoolkid at the time of the Gurindji walkout from Wave Hill station. I was an activist in Aboriginal affairs. I was our school representative and can remember going to Gurindji protests. For decades we never ate anything that we knew came from Vestey Brothers. It was truly extraordinary to find out about this action that had preceded that walkout by some 20 years. The more one reads about and understands this story, one has to accept that the conditions that many of these pastoral workers experienced in that region of Western Australia were really akin to slavery. Many workers had no pay. In fact, the majority had no pay. They had some rations. If they were paid, it was an absolute fraction of what was given to white personnel on the station, notwithstanding that they were seen to be people of exceptional skill as stockmen and shearers. In many cases, women had to make themselves available at the will of their white masters, and they were not free to leave those stations.

One of the insights I gained while preparing for this motion is that it was the Aboriginal people who first sought out Don McLeod. He obviously came into the area without a great knowledge of what was going on within the Aboriginal community. But he was a good guy, and when someone was injured, he was prepared to drive them to the hospital in Port Hedland. The Aboriginal community developed a relationship with him and approached him to go down to Perth to find out what their legal rights were. They wanted to know why they could not leave a station that they did not like and go elsewhere. In a way, that then began this journey. The anger that was simmering below the surface and seemingly not generally understood became known and manifested itself in Don McLeod going to Perth and learning about what an extraordinarily bad situation it was. He came back, I think, quite transformed. He worked with the community to work out a strategy to deal with the situation. As Hon Laurie Graham said, it led to the extraordinary law meeting in Skull Springs in 1942. It was a six-week event. It was a law event; it was not just about the workers, but that was an important part of it. People came all the way from Alice Springs and Darwin, including Martu, Nyamal and Niapaili people. Twenty-three language groups came to the meeting. They made the decision to not strike until 1 May 1946 because they wanted the war to be over before they took action. At that meeting they appointed two people as leaders to work with Don McLeod. Dooley Bin Bin was to represent the desert areas and Clancy McKenna was to represent the settled areas. Those two gentlemen became the great leaders of the strike.

The first strike occurred on 1 May 1946. It was only a relatively small group that came out at that time. Pressure was put on the Aboriginal community to rat on Don McLeod and to nominate others to try to incriminate them. The conduct of that Aboriginal community, its steadfastness and loyalty, was absolutely exceptional. Reading

some of the stories reminds me of stories from my childhood of what happened with the Irish—the pressure put on people to dob in others, and their refusal to do it. The strike led to both Dooley Bin Bin and Clancy McKenna being jailed. They were chained around the neck and given three-months hard labour for their participation in the strike. Five weeks later, after a lot of pressure from the more progressive part of the community, the union movement, the Communist Party of Australia and parts of the Labor Party, they were released by the then justice minister. In the meantime, the strike had grown. Over the next month, workers from, I think, 22 stations walked off. They were not cowed by what had gone on; they were inspired by the actions and the courage of the first leaders. This went on until 1949. I commend the Seamen's Union of Australia of the time, under the leadership of the great Paddy Troy. The union determined to blackball the wool from pastoralists in the Pilbara. The wool bales then piled high on the docks and the dispute was finally resolved.

One of the beautiful things that I have seen happen over the last four years is a revival of the appreciation of this strike in Pilbara communities. In particular, I am lucky to have been able to acquire some of Mr Gardiner's paintings. He was a boy at the time of the strike and lived in those early camps where they yandied for a living. He has done beautiful artwork. The way he captured those strikers and the whole culture of that is absolutely superb. I have a painting by Owen Biljabu of a Strelley stockman, which is completely stunning and compelling. The younger generation is rediscovering this great history and the strength of people such as Peter Coppin whose son Barry Taylor is still representing this great story today. I want to commend all those people, the Town of Port Hedland and a whole group of organisations, who got together and recreated that event on 1 May this year to celebrate the heroism, the courage and the ingenuity of these people who stood up to get their just entitlement.

HON KYLE McGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.51 am]: I, too, would like to commend Hon Laurie Graham for bringing this very good motion to this house to be discussed here today. I would like to start with a warning to advise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who may be listening or reading this speech in the future that I may mention names of people who have passed on.

I would like to pay my respects to all the people involved in the massive Pilbara strike 75 years ago. As Hon Alannah MacTiernan alluded to, the Maritime Union of Australia, the union that I come from, has a very long history of supporting Aboriginal rights across the country that spans back to the 1800s and the Barcaldine strike in northern Queensland, which led to the formation of the Labor Party. The union called a black ban on wool exports in Queensland whilst the shearers were on strike in Barcaldine. That strike is hugely significant and people should definitely look into it if they want a taste of the history of workers' rights in this country.

I first became engaged in Aboriginal activism in the Northern Territory under the leadership of Thomas Mayor at the MUA. There was a man who had a great history at the MUA in a strike that seems to have been inspired by the 1946 strike—the Gurindji people's Wave Hill walk-off. This man in the MUA, up until his passing, was a massive activist for people who were vulnerable, and his name was Brian Manning. Brian Manning was a wharfie at the time of the Wave Hill walk-off. He would get in his old truck, fill it with supplies, food and water, and drive it out to Wave Hill where the strikers were. Every year, the Wave Hill walk-off is remembered and people who were involved in it are celebrated for what caused a huge change for Aboriginal rights in Australia.

Turning to the 1946 strike, as members have already mentioned, it is amazing to do research and read about the hardships that took place. I read comments that bosses would go around and kick Aboriginal people who were on the ground while they were asleep and say, "Get up. Time to go to work." A total disrespect and slave mentality came out of some of those pastoralists. It astounds me that 800 people got together right across different stations and managed to communicate in a way that they understood. Obviously, literacy and numeracy was an issue in that day and age, and today, but they were able to organise themselves with the tools to understand that withdrawing our labour is the only right we have as human beings in the workforce. I think that right should never be taken away. The opportunity for someone to take a stand by withdrawing their labour is an entitlement we are all given from birth, and that should be respected and protected well into the future. That is exactly what these men and women did. They took the opportunity to line up the strike with 1 May and the start of the shearing season to make full impact. That was a genuine strategy to ensure that when they withdrew their labour, the maximum impact was felt and they got their desired outcome. A massive amount of time would have gone into the communications, which in the Pilbara in the 1940s would have been very difficult. I can only imagine the challenges with the lack of road infrastructure and communication ability. Aboriginal people migrated and moved around. It has been stated that people were locked to stations and they could not leave, but I suggest that people were going between groups and were not on the pastoral stations doing the work, but were acting more as union organisers in that space to ensure that everyone was on target to all go out at the exact same time to get the maximum impact.

I refer to an article I found while doing some research that I think is really interesting. It was published on 15 November 2020 by ABC news and is titled "Remembering the 1946 Pilbara strike, Australia's longest, that paved the way for Indigenous rights". I gave my precursor because I am going to mention someone who passed on. In

this story Marshall Smith referred to his cousin, who was 19 years of age and has passed on now, Monty Smith. He went across to Mt Brockman station as a horse-breaker. Mr Marshall said —

> "The station manager at the time was a very hard man, an ex-boxer who didn't take any nonsense, and he would boot the Aboriginal workers in their swags to wake up and sometimes he would go as far as whipping them with a stockwhip.
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> …
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> "It must have been a fairly serious hiding because my cousin left the Pilbara straight away, walking to Carnarvon where he remained for the rest of his life until he passed on."

He walked from the Pilbara down to Carnarvon; that is such a vast distance to walk. This 19-year-old was subjected to that. I assume that when it says "he left", he would have run away, rather than being allowed to leave, which is why he went so far—to get away. There are obviously many stories. Don McLeod, Dooley Bin Bin and Clancy McKenna have already been mentioned. They were obviously key parts of this strike. Coordinating the strike and activists going around to get people to agree to withdraw their labour was a first for Western Australia in the Aboriginal rights space. It would be such an interesting conversation to hear today, to see the passion of these people to ensure that Aboriginal people were given better rights and not treated as second-class citizens, as they undoubtedly were treated.

The strike was coordinated and led by Dooley Bin Bin and Clancy McKenna. The strike was most effective in the Pilbara region. Further afield, in Broome and Derby and inland towns, there was a lot of police suppression. The police were able to rally around and force Aboriginal people back to work and out of the strike. I am proud that, as I mentioned earlier, not only were the waterfront workers involved in the Barcaldine strike in the 1800s, but the Seamen's Union of Australia played a bit of a role in getting the Pilbara strike to end by putting a black ban on wool and taking a stand with Aboriginal people to improve workers' rights and life in general. I am always proud when I read through the history of the Maritime Union of Australia, which was an amalgamation of many unions—but specifically the Waterside Workers' Federation and the Seamen's Union of Australia—that came together in 1993. The Seamen's Union had a huge record, as I said, for standing up for Aboriginal rights and coordinating pastoral stations and the maritime and export sectors. It was such a sophisticated thing to do. In our day and age, it would be considered to be a secondary boycott, but back then it was clear that it was the only angle that could be used to ensure that other industries got behind Aboriginal workers and stood with them side by side. As I said, that was reflected in the Wave Hill walk-off in which the Gurindji took a stand and in other places.

When I look at the later years after 1946—the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s—I definitely notice many great stories of Aboriginal stockmen, particularly out of Halls Creek and Fitzroy, who were working for pay. I think a definite ode should be played for the 1946 strike.

I will mention quickly, in the 20 seconds that I have left, that across this country there are a lot of situations in which Aboriginal people were treated like this; their wages were not paid and still have not been paid. In Queensland, activists are pushing for and rallying around to get those wages paid to the people who earned them.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [12.01 pm]: I want to make a quick contribution to the motion. I thank Hon Laurie Graham for bringing it to the chamber.

I started working in Aboriginal affairs in 1998—in those days it was called the central desert—and it did not take long for the strikers' cousins in the western desert to tell me about the 1946 strike. I was educated and raised in Western Australia, but I did not know about this strike. It did not take long for me to find out all about it. It is a part of those Aboriginal people's DNA. It is about the time in which especially the Mardu and Nyamal and other Indigenous groups worked in the area around Yandeyarra, Strelley and those stations that existed in those days. It was a time when they stood up and found out what it took, I suppose, to be heard.

Members will know that Aboriginal people did not have a vote then; in those days they were still listed under flora and fauna. As previous speakers have said, the treatment that was handed out—not by all, but by a lot of people—was pretty tough. It has become clear to me that the mums, dads, uncles and aunties of Aboriginal elders of today—they are even now starting to grow old—were part of this strike. They are very proud and I see their eyes glisten when they talk about the strike.

When I say it was an eye-opener for me, that is because it is part of a weakness in our education system at the moment. This is part of Western Australia's history but we do not hear about it in schools. I believe that programs are now available for young children today to find out about this stuff. This was a major event in our state's history. I know that the Aboriginal people in the Pilbara, in particular, are very proud of this time when they stood up—they stood up and they stood up. It was a long strike. Many people went through tough times to achieve an outcome—

that is, to be treated equally and to be paid for the work that they did, and not just in the food and rations that they received beforehand.

Those elders, as I mentioned, are now growing quite old. They are the children of the people who were involved in that strike. They are the people who are leading the way in modern Aboriginal life. They are guiding their families and children to strive for more in their future. I have been involved in discussions with many of those elders, whether it was while I was working in sport and recreation, education and health, or working with mining companies when it came to training and employment, or even when it came to sitting down with them and listening to what they wanted to achieve as a group in this modern world today. It comes back to that 1946 strike. It comes back to the time that they stood up; the time when they mobilised. They were supported by some fantastic unions at the time. I acknowledge the work that the unions did to support them.

It is great that this strike is being celebrated. I would have loved to have been there on 1 May. Working in this place does not always allow us to just flitter around and go where we would like to go. I know how proud a moment it would have been.

As I said before, it was a time when Aboriginal people were lifted up. They realised what they needed to do to compete in the new society in 1946. Aboriginal people have achieved an enormous amount since that time. That has been due to the courage, hard work and steadfastness of their elders who started that movement 75 years ago.

The 1946 strike is famous all around the world. First Nations people in Canada and other Indigenous groups around the world know the story, yet so many people in Western Australia do not. I am very proud to acknowledge that strike of 75 years ago. It was a proud moment for the Aboriginal people of Western Australia, in particular Aboriginal people in the Pilbara.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [12.06 pm]: It is my pleasure, both as the new Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Minister for Industrial Relations, but also as a representative of the Mining and Pastoral Region and a member who is based in Port Hedland where this historic rebellion took place in 1946, to rise this afternoon to speak on the motion moved by Hon Laurie Graham. Looking back, this industrial action would have helped shaped Western Australia's history in my books. The strike is widely regarded as having transformed Aboriginal rights in an era in which Aboriginal people were treated as grossly inferior.

At this stage I want to acknowledge the good work of the Town of Port Hedland and the previous commissioner for the Town of Port Hedland, Hon Fred Riebeling, who in April 2020 led debate and got council to endorse the renaming of Leap Park in Hedland to Strike Park. The proposal was sent to the Geographic Names Committee for approval and, as previously mentioned, on 1 May this year, Mayor Peter Carter did the honours of reopening Strike Park in Port Hedland. I also want to acknowledge Mayor Peter Carter for his work in seeing this project through to fruition.

The day the strike started, 1 May 1946, was chosen because of its global significance for workers' rights everywhere—May Day. Almost 1 000 Aboriginal men and women walked off 26 pastoral stations, demanding proper wages and conditions. Before that strike, Aboriginal people were widely employed in Pilbara stations in a variety of roles—as drovers, station hands, gardeners and cleaners. Many believe the pastoral industry owes its early success to this labour. However, Aboriginal employees were rarely paid with money; instead, they received payment in flour, tea, clothes and occasionally meat. Many Aboriginal people were upset at this treatment on what was traditionally their own land and decided enough was enough. Secret meetings were held and a plan was hatched. The walk-off was meticulously planned over four years. It was all done in secret with creative messaging and intelligence sharing between groups on stations covering a huge area encompassing Nullagine, Marble Bar, Port Hedland, Roebourne and Onslow. As most Aboriginal people could not then read or write, they were given calendars, some hidden on the back of jam tins, to mark off the days until the strike.

When the day finally came on 1 May 1946, about 800 Aboriginal people walked off the land and away from their jobs, trudging many kilometres to Port Hedland from wherever they were to join the strike. As has been mentioned, the pastoralists had no idea it was coming, and it shocked them. Hon Colin Tincknell mentioned in his contribution that it was a very long strike. It took until probably 1949, to be honest, for it to be finally fixed. The walk-off completely shut down the wool-growing industry of the Pilbara, which was completely reliant on exploitative Aboriginal labour. As we heard previously, the success of the strike was due to the extraordinary collaboration between a number of people, including Don McLeod, as mentioned previously; Clancy McKenna; Dooley Bin Bin; and Nyamal elder Peter "Kangushot" Coppin, to name just a few. In all, 23 cultural groups of the Pilbara participated in what was an extraordinary demonstration of Aboriginal unity. Although many went back to the stations in 1949 after the station owners promised better conditions and finally paid wages, many never went back and many more remained on strike indefinitely.

I want to acknowledge Hon Kyle McGinn's contribution and his acknowledgement, along with others, of the union movement and its role in assisting the strikers at the time, particularly the Maritime Union of Australia. I understand

that Don McLeod was also a delegate of the Australian Workers' Union at the time. Those unions in particular paid a great deal of attention and gave a great deal of support to the strikers. This action started what has become the great tradition of the union movement in supporting Aboriginal political action, which continues to this day.

The Pilbara walk-off was probably the forerunner of a number of celebrated Aboriginal strikes across the country. The Gurindji strike took place when Vincent Lingiari led his countrymen off Lord Vestey's Wave Hill station in the Northern Territory. That action is celebrated in Paul Kelly's song *From Little Things Big Things Grow* and is probably like the unofficial national anthem in this country. That action, too, was supported by the union moment in the Northern Territory and led to the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act. Certainly, the strike in the Pilbara signifies the birth of the modern Indigenous rights self-determination movement and should be better known than it is. It is great that we are talking about it in this place today and acknowledging how important that day was for many, many Western Australians and how it set Western Australia on a better journey.

There are two dimensions to the Pilbara strike that are worth reflecting on. First, the Aboriginal groups forged an independent economic base through tin mining before Pilbara's iron ore became Australia's economic powerhouse and, second, it demonstrated what can be achieved with a unified voice.

I want to again acknowledge those who were involved in this action in 1946. It is an important part of Western Australia's history. I also want to again acknowledge the role that the Town of Port Hedland played in working with the traditional owners of the Pilbara over the past couple of years to make sure that we remember this action for eternity. It is great that Strike Park is a place in Port Hedland that we can visit and remember a time, many, many years ago when things were different and were not right. Although there are some outstanding, ongoing issues from the 1946 strike and the non-payment of Aboriginal pastoral workers at the time, here's hoping that we get those issues fixed over the next few years. Hopefully, those who have not been paid for working on pastoral stations for many, many years will get some restitution. With that, I thank Hon Laurie Graham for bringing this motion to the house today.

HON MATTHEW SWINBOURN (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.14 pm]: I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this motion that Hon Laurie Graham put forward. What a motion it is to end the member's parliamentary career on. It is an important issue that recognises something that unfortunately does not get a lot of attention, unlike some other things. I think it is important that we are speaking on this particular issue in this Parliament today on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Pilbara strike.

I have undying admiration for the bravery of the 800 or so people in the north west who went on strike and for those who supported them walking off the job in support of better working conditions, if we can call them that. We have to remember that these workers were essentially not much more than slaves in the they were treated. They were essentially indentured to their work. They were not paid wages; they were paid by "truck", as they say, for the essentials of life, but they had to go into debt to get the materials they wanted to do the jobs they needed to do. It is appalling to think that in this state in 1946—only 75 years ago—people were labouring under such conditions. That should alarm us all and be a warning to us to not allow this sort of thing to happen again. I cannot imagine what it was like to walk off like they did and to work under the oppressive laws that tied them to the stations that made them essentially chattels for the station owners.

As Western Australians, we can reflect with pride that these Western Australian Aboriginal people did this, but we must also reflect on it as a period of shame for our own past and the part that we played in it. The Labor Party has a part in this. It is a fact that a state Labor government was in power at the time of the walk-off in 1946. It was through the state Labor government that the police force used its oppressive powers against the Aboriginal people and it is through that Labor government that those people were imprisoned for periods of time after taking what we believe is a right for all workers, which is to take industrial action to protest working conditions. A Labor government was in power during that period and we need to own up to that. The Labor Party's industrial and political wings are not always in sync with each other, but the Labor Party can be proud that the industrial wing stood up to the political wing of the Labor Party and pulled it back in line. There was a change of government not very long after the walk-off occurred. I think a conservative government was in power for the remaining time. We must own our history and be up-front about it. Although we can say that we are proud of the Aboriginal people and the unions who were involved in supporting them and of the other civil groups that supported them like the women's temperance union, we must also acknowledge the part that all our predecessors in the political parties played in the oppression of Aboriginal people in this state. We cannot get away from that. I am sorry that that is part of our history, but we must do better and not allow ourselves to fall back into the habits of the people of that time.

It is quite special that the renaming of an existing park to Strike Park gives recognition to that history because parks connect us back to these events of the past. Although the name Strike Park perhaps does not conjure exactly what happened, I hope that it will stimulate conversations and that memorial plaques will be placed up there so that people can learn about this black and white history. When I am up there, I will certainly take time to visit it.

As I said before, I reflect on the Seamen's Union of Australia and the dock workers' union, which were predecessors of the Maritime Union of Australia, and the role they played in supporting Aboriginal people and their rights. A lot of other unions, including a union that represented carpenters, also played a part.

In reflecting on this event, one of the things I thought about was the fact that we often hear the refrain in here that those were different times with different values and we cannot judge what happened at that time according to our values today. What is really important about what happened in 1946 is that people out there were saying that the treatment of Aboriginal people in Western Australia was not good enough—that it was not up to scratch, they needed the same rights as other workers, they needed to be paid a fair day's wage for a fair day's work and all those sorts of things. When we hear the refrain that we cannot judge according to our values, we need to look a bit deeper, because there were voices out there that were pointing the way to a much more correct and proper way of dealing with these things. As I say, I appreciate that. I hope that Aboriginal people in the north west learn that Hon Laurie Graham has moved this motion today, that we are talking about Aboriginal people in this Parliament in a way that they were not talked about in 1946 and that they are aware of our acknowledgement of their struggles. I commend the motion to the house.

Visitors — St Francis Xavier Primary School

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Martin Aldridge): Before I offer the opportunity to the mover of the motion to reply, I welcome the schoolchildren from St Francis Xavier Primary School into the public gallery. Welcome to your Legislative Council.

Debate Resumed

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.21 pm]: Thank you, Mr Acting President. It was a good opportunity for you to acknowledge the staff and students from St Francis Xavier Primary School in that wonderful place of Geraldton in the Agricultural Region. We worked so hard to get the hospital in Geraldton done and all those great things, and it is great to have the students in here today. I hope they enjoy their time in the Legislative Council.

This is a very important motion. As members have touched on, it is a fitting way for Hon Laurie Graham to end his time here. The motion is a bit like Hon Laurie Graham, who does not make a lot of fuss and does not draw a lot of attention to the things that he does. This action and this piece of history are much the same. There are many things in our history that we do not espouse loudly enough, including our cultural history, our Aboriginal history throughout the thousands of years that Aboriginal people have lived on this land in Western Australia, and also our labour history. We have some amazing stories from labour history since colonisation. It would have been particularly difficult to organise a group of Aboriginal people to go on strike on 1 May 1946, which changed the course of labour history in the state forever. It is fitting that we acknowledge the seventy-fifth anniversary of that very important event and the actions of those who were involved, particularly Don McLeod, who was the go-between for the people involved. Those people have all been mentioned and we acknowledge the work of every person who was involved in that action. That action had a profound effect on the future of labour relations, how Aboriginal people were treated and how working people were treated. It was no longer okay to have someone working on a property for no payment and it was no longer okay to treat people as slaves and have them working for free. That would not be tolerated today. That change was made because of the actions of those people on those stations in the Pilbara in 1946. I am very proud to be part of a political organisation that continues the fight for working people and their rights and conditions and to make their lives better, particularly Aboriginal workers across the state. A very significant event occurred 75 years ago and I am particularly pleased that Hon Laurie Graham has brought this motion forward for debate today. I must say that it is disappointing that we did not get a more bipartisan contribution to what is a very important part of Western Australia's history.

The fight continues, members, and as a person who is coming back to this chamber in the next term, I say we will continue to fight for the rights of workers and Aboriginal people across Western Australia. These wins are what keep activists going. We think it is a significant piece of history that is certainly worthy of being brought before the house for debate. It is a fitting way for my very good friend and colleague to finish his parliamentary career. I naturally support the motion.

I acknowledge the wonderful work of Hon Laurie Graham over the last four years. We will miss him around here and we will certainly miss him as a representative of the Agricultural Region, who has helped many people over the last four years. I thank Hon Laurie Graham for moving the motion; we support it wholeheartedly. It is about a very important piece of Western Australian history that needs to be debated from time to time.

HON LAURIE GRAHAM (Agricultural) [12.25 pm] — in reply: I will say a few words in reply. Hon Darren West has managed to embarrass me yet again, this time on the way out the door. That is nothing unusual. I thank Minister MacTiernan for her contribution; she is obviously passionate about this issue. It is an issue close to her

heart and it was good to hear her contribution this morning. As a local member in the area, Hon Kyle McGinn was very keen to contribute, as was Hon Colin Tincknell. I was talking to Hon Colin Tincknell about this issue yesterday and he expressed his interest in the future welfare of Aboriginal people. I thank Minister Dawson for giving the government's reply. Last but not least, it is best that I acknowledge the contribution made by my colleague Hon Darren West.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.