

LIQUOR, HOSPITALITY AND MISCELLANEOUS UNION — FALSE ADVERTISING

Grievance

MR P. ABETZ (Southern River) [9.59 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Commerce as the minister responsible for industrial relations and it concerns what can best be described as false advertising or, to put a different slant on it, thuggish behaviour of officials from the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union. Earlier this year, shortly after I moved into my new electorate office, an organiser from the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union contacted my office asking for an appointment for me to meet with a small delegation from his union. In keeping with my policy to meet with people, whether rich or poor or business owners or workers, I readily agreed. When the delegation came, we had an open and frank discussion about the pay differential between cleaners employed by private contractors and those employed by the government. I agreed to take up those issues with the minister. Within days, before I could possibly have been given a response from the minister, someone from the union drove a trailer around my electorate with a sign saying that I was not prepared to support a fair pay deal for cleaners. The union did likewise in several other marginal Liberal seats. I wrote to the union and informed it that I considered this to be outrageous conduct, and that until the union apologised for its conduct, I would not be willing to meet with any future delegations from the union, although I would be happy to meet with individual members of the union who lived in my electorate.

I have been true to my word. Recently, some members of the union who live in my electorate and who are teachers' assistants said that they wanted to meet with me about what they saw as the inadequate pay offer that has been put on the table by the government, and, again, I readily agreed to meet with them, and an appointment was locked in, although they ended up cancelling it for personal reasons and work issues that came up, and they have not rescheduled that appointment.

Given my willingness to interact with the LHMU workers, one would wonder why that union would want to squander the funds of its members on a full-page advertisement in the *Comment News* on 1 September to make false claims about me, their local member of Parliament. The union wasted roughly \$5 000 on that advertisement. The following week, it wasted probably another \$5 000 on a similar advertisement against the member for Riverton. For the benefit of members, I will hold up a copy of that advertisement.

Dr M.D. Nahan: That is a breach of occupational safety and health! Look at that! The person in that ad is not wearing gloves!

Mr P. ABETZ: Yes! The advertisement asserts that Peter Abetz, MLA, will not support a fair pay deal for workers at our local schools.

Mr D.A. Templeman: What is wrong with that? Do you support them?

Mr P. ABETZ: I do support a fair pay deal, and I agreed to take up that matter with the minister. However, the union made the decision that even though I had said that I would support its drive for a fair pay deal, I did not support it, because it obviously had its signs ready before its members even came to meet with me. Never mind. The union made no attempt to discuss this matter with me and took it upon itself to make dishonest claims about me. We can only wonder at what would motivate the union to do this. I would suggest to members that if a business were to engage in this kind of dishonest advertising, it would fall foul of the Fair Trading Act and the Trade Practices Act. Those acts state that "a person shall not, in trade or commerce, engage in conduct that is misleading or deceptive or is likely to mislead or deceive". If this union were a business, this advertisement would certainly fall foul of the law. Other Liberal members of Parliament have had 40-plus LHMU members barge into their offices unannounced, demanding to see the member and acting abusively. Such thuggish behaviour certainly does nothing to further the cause of the workers. As I have said, we can only wonder at what would motivate the union to engage in this kind of behaviour. The LHMU website gives us the answer. It tells us that the union is committed to targeting marginal Liberal seats. It is not about wage justice for its workers.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Mr P. ABETZ: Mr Dave Kelly, the secretary of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union, happens to also be the vice president of WA Labor. Mr Kelly is more concerned, it would seem, about his own career within the ALP and about winning back Liberal-held seats in three years' time than he is about getting a much-needed wage rise for his members. I wonder how many LHMU members are aware that their union donated \$176 000 to the Labor Party's last election campaign. That is more than was donated by any other union in Western Australia. I wonder whether LHMU members are aware that their hard-earned union fees are being diverted to a dishonest Labor Party campaign that will have no beneficial outcome for their current justified push for a wage increase. It seems to me that if Dave Kelly and the LHMU staff were to invest more energy and more of their

members' funds in the current wage negotiations, rather than on trying to prop up a crumbling Labor Party by engaging in thuggish behaviour in the vain hope that they might win some more seats at the next election, they would get a much better outcome. Given that Dave Kelly is so busy trying to shore up support for his planned move to politics, I ask the minister to inform the house—so that I can, in turn, convey this to the LHMU members in my electorate—just what is going on with their enterprise bargaining agreement negotiation, and how this is an application of the government's public sector wages policy.

MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse — Minister for Commerce) [10.05 am]: I thank the member for Southern River for raising the issues surrounding the outrageous—bordering on scandalous—behaviour of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Why are you not still paired? You were paired. How come you have come back for this? I thought you had a very important meeting to go to.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Strange things happen! I do apologise for that. That is a genuine mistake on my behalf. I was supposed to be at a meeting, but that meeting did not happen, so I am here.

I want to get back to the issue. The issue is the outrageous behaviour of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union. We have one of its former officials here, the member for Nollamara. The member for Southern River's grievance has highlighted the fact that often for new members of Parliament, particularly on this side, it is a bit of a voyage of discovery to understand—it is certainly not clearly understood by the vast populace of this state—the extent to which the union movement and the Australian Labor Party are one and the same. It is clear from the history of the ALP that that is where it is from. I do not think that is an issue. That is an historical fact. Unions are an enduring part of the Australian Labor Party in this state. That started at the time of the tree of knowledge, which is unfortunately dying, but, anyhow, that is the way it is.

Mr F.M. Logan: It actually started out of the shearers' strike.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I understand. I was once a member of that union.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Most people do not understand the extent of those links. Over the past 10 years, the miscellaneous workers union has donated about \$852 000 to the Labor Party in Western Australia. Some of that money was used to pay the wages of the now member for Cannington in a previous life when he ran so successfully the state election campaign last year.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: But he was rewarded for that outcome! He has got a seat in Parliament with us!

Anyway, the missos have had to go through a bit of a learning curve as well following the election of the new government. They have had to learn that our government is not as responsive to its demands on government as the former government was. There were senior ministers in the former government who once held senior positions in that union. They had quite a degree of influence over the policy of the former government. The former member for Fremantle was once the state secretary, if that is the correct term, at missos house on Thomas Street in West Perth. But times have changed.

Ms J.M. Freeman: It is called the Stan Hardy building.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is right. The member for Nollamara is a former member of the missos. She is setting up a Labor Party branch, I understand, in her electorate. She is setting up that branch because she thinks that because she is the local member, the local community should have input into the Labor Party. That is fair. However, some of the membership applications fell off the back of a truck. Interestingly, all of the applicants named in those applications are members of the miscellaneous workers union! Those applicants live right across the metropolitan area. Not one of those applicants lives in the local area.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Actually, what the Labor Party is doing is using taxpayers' funds —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.M. Harvey): Order! Members, I understand that this is a highly contentious issue, apparently, in the house today, but in the interests of Hansard reporting accurately the debate, I request that members respect the call that I have given to the minister.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I do not mind; that is okay. The member for Nollamara can bulk up her branch to give the missos a couple of more votes in some forum. I am sure all her colleagues are very supportive of that. Let us move on.

They do not have the control over government policy they once had.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I would not guarantee it.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.M. Harvey): Member for Rockingham!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: What we have is a blurring between a genuine industrial campaign and a political campaign. I think some of the tactics have been a little over the top. They have a right to protest and to make their points known to members of Parliament, and we have an obligation to listen, as we have done, but parking a trailer across —

Mr M.P. Whitely: Are you becoming an arbiter of good taste? Troy Buswell's etiquette school!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: We all know what the unions wanted to do with the member for Bassendean when the seat of Roleystone was abolished.

An opposition member: We love him.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Does the member love him? I heard that members opposite had to draw straws to work out who would share an office with him, and poor old John D'Orazio drew the short straw! Apparently it was to much acclaim from members opposite that he trooped down the corridor to share an office with the member for Bassendean, here in Parliament! When the current member for Bassendean's former seat evaporated, it was Ruth Webber—the one-term senator—who saved his skin.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is all right, then.

The political campaign and industrial campaign has blurred. I think some of the tactics have been marginal, and I think we will probably see more of them, because there is now an issue with the pay offer. We need to work through that. I think the member for Southern River is right; the advertisement he held up has a number of flaws. Can I look at it?

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am not aware that members, when in the middle of the speech, are able to walk across the chamber to receive material from another member, but I think it is highly irregular and could be considered unparliamentary. I request a ruling on whether that is allowed, because if it is allowed, I might in future walk over to that side and talk to the government when I am making a speech!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.M. Harvey): There is no point of order. However, members need to be in their seat when making a speech.

Debate Resumed

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I have met this chap Brett; he came to my office with a delegation from the union, and he is a good, decent person. He raised some serious issues that he confronts in his personal life to do with his salary, and I accept those issues. This is not an easy time to negotiate wages. However, as I have said in this place many times, our wages policy is fair in comparison with what is happening in other Australian jurisdictions. I acknowledge the fact that Brett's conditions are not what he would deem to be suitable; he has explained that to me very clearly. However, in the context of what is being offered around Australia in the current economic environment, the policy is fair and affordable, and it is an outcome that we will offer to the union and others as enterprise bargaining agreements come up for debate.

Mr F.M. Logan: It's still well below levels in the private sector.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I should point out—I will point this out to Brett next time I meet him—that the union needs to be a bit careful. In this advertisement, Brett is cleaning the urinal without wearing gloves or safety goggles; he is sending a very bad message to other union members. I am sure that Brett would not deliberately do so, but I would hate to think that he is setting a bad example, because he is a decent person to those other hardworking cleaners around the state.