

1998 AUSTRALIAN WATERFRONT DISPUTE

Statement

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [5.22 pm]: I rise today to bring to the house a reminder of what happened on this day, 24 years ago. On this day, 24 years ago, the government in charge had an agenda to destroy the working class in this country, and it did that by sending balaclava-wearing security guards, with dogs, down to the waterfront to drag union workers off the job. That was Patrick —

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Sorry, continue. What was that?

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Sorry, I cannot hear the member.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Some people do not understand what workers' rights are, and that would be those on the other side of the chamber. They should listen up because they are about to get an education —

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: It is quite amusing that we talk about workers' rights and the John Howard era of kicking wharfies off the job and I have to listen to the baffle from the other side of the chamber. Honestly, members on the other side of the chamber, and particularly Hon Neil Thomson, have no clue on what has happened in this country with workers' rights and they should listen instead of baffle. I will continue.

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: I would like to continue —

The PRESIDENT: Order! It would be really good to hear this statement and any member's contribution in silence.

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! It is not cross-chamber chatter. It is members' statements. Member, please continue.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: I will try my best not to entertain the circus. I want to get on with this.

At 7.00 pm, 24 years ago, we saw the Howard government show its true colours on workplace relations. It sent security guards wearing balaclavas down to the waterfront and dragged wharfies off the job. It was in cahoots with Patrick's, the stevedoring company at the time, which was training wharfies in Dubai who would be brought in to replace Australian workers with a workforce that was non-unionised. What happened? We saw the workers of Australia unite. We saw them fight back against a government that did not care about Australian jobs then and, quite frankly, I do not think they care about Australian jobs now. The Liberal government's industrial relations agenda has not changed since 1998, and I do not think it will change because it tends to lack the ability to see that local employment is critical. In 1998, unions, workers and communities supported the waterfront workers in every port across Australia. I know there are members in this chamber who supported the wharfies in Fremantle.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Those of us who stayed the night down there.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: That is right. They were down there supporting workers. In the end, they won and they were returned to the job. They got back in there. They did not listen to Corrigan and Howard, sitting there destroying workers' rights—the Liberal agenda.

I always remember one really infamous story. I believe that police were sent down to Melbourne to bust up the picket line. Men, women and children all locked arms. The coppers came in to break it up. Their goal was to rip them off the job, chuck them in the back of the paddy wagon and get them out of there. Whilst they were doing that, the construction workers joined forces in the city and came in behind the police officers. We had a picket line at the front of the gate, with men, women and children all linked in arms, and then the police came in and the construction union came in behind them. The police had to be escorted out. The picket line remained.

Later, the court decision came down, which clarified that the government was acting corruptly and the wharfies were returned to the job. I am proud to stand here today and say that Patrick's tried to do it again. It tried to get rid of the agreement in the current round of the negotiations. I believe that just last week, Patrick's signed a new enterprise bargaining agreement—a union agreement, once again—containing fair rates of pay and conditions. Even after 1998, we are still seeing the same attacks occur under the current industrial relations regime.

To all the Maritime Union of Australia members, their families who were on the picket line and to all the supporters, I say thank you. What you did in standing up for workers' rights showed what should be done in this country, not

the agenda that a federal Liberal government is so easily swayed to impose, which is to destroy workers' rights. Well done to the MUA. The slogan is always "MUA, here to stay".