




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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**SUGAR INDUSTRY (ARBITRATION FOR MILL OWNERS AND SUGAR
MARKETING ENTITIES) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumba—ALP) (9.31 pm): I rise to speak against this bill. I believe that this bill undermines a reform that has delivered a real resurgence in the sugar industry, and that is deregulation. The sugar industry brings in \$2 billion in export earnings to the state and it has been boosted by foreign investment, which has been encouraged by deregulation. In recent years, because of deregulation and reform, the mill owners have invested \$3 billion into infrastructure, but any more foreign investment will be chased away by this inimical meddling by the LNP.

The LNP wants to reverse deregulation and reform. This is after the federal government delivered \$444 million to support this reform and the state invested \$85 million. That lot opposite have an arrogant disdain of the expenditure of these public funds. Why are we putting the growth of this industry under threat? As the Minister for Agriculture said, it is nothing to do with the good of the industry; it is about picking sides and folding to ultimatums. This bill has nothing to do with the good of the industry.

Do members know who was not mentioned by the LNP? The member for Maryborough referred to them. The blue-collar workers at the mills. Half of the guys I went to school with ended up working at the mills. No member opposite has chosen to speak on behalf of the mill workers across Queensland. Representatives of industry and commerce in Queensland tell us that this so-called change in this bill, introduced by the LNP, is not good for the industry.

The last time the LNP meddled in the sugar industry in 2015, an article in the *Australian Financial Review* stated—

Queensland is poised to re-regulate its \$2 billion sugar industry, only 10 years after a \$444 million bailout package from federal taxpayers to move the industry away from government intervention.

...

A recent Queensland Productivity Commission report warned the plan ... to reintroduce pre-arbitration between cane growers and the sugar mills could cost the industry millions ... The commission found no evidence of abuse of market power by the sugar millers—as claimed by cane growers—saying commercial negotiations had delivered significant investment into the industry.

At that time, the *Courier-Mail* also stated the following in its editorial—

... an unholy alliance between the LNP and Katter's Australian Party seems hellbent on dragging Queensland back to some agrarian socialist dystopia ... even debating re-regulation of the state's \$2 billion sugar industry—effectively re-establishing a single-desk system—is simply extraordinary ... It ... beggars belief that the Parliament would even consider such a move in a modern 21st century economy.

...

What is also hard to believe is that the LNP—a party which allegedly stands for private enterprise, smaller government and free markets—has allowed itself to be captured by this nonsense.

Those are the words of the *Courier-Mail*. When the *Courier-Mail* states that, one would think that the members opposite would listen. What are they doing? They are digging their hole deeper. We know the saying, 'When in a hole, stop digging.' I cannot understand why the members opposite have become born-again agrarian socialists. This bill is heavy-handed regulation by the state. They are embracing that. Under this bill, the state becomes a monopolistic director of economic activity.

I certainly salute the member for Dalrymple and the member for Mount Isa for going down this track. They have nailed their colours to the mast. They have a broad suite of policies along this line and they are proud of them. My question to the LNP members is: why are they doing this? We know that it is partially political preservation. The concern of the members opposite is not about the economic betterment of our state; their concern is internal: how to keep their party together.

An opposition member: Rubbish!

Mr WHITING: I do not think it is rubbish, because we on this side know that the Queensland LNP has deteriorated into a party of schisms, splinters and cells. Over the past eight or 10 years, the LNP has had about seven leaders. That shows how structurally divided it is. This bill is the kind of legislation that the members opposite have to introduce to keep people in the tent. It is all to keep some federal politicians happy. It is all to keep George Christensen from walking. What did George Christensen—the friend of the member for Whitsunday—say today? George Christensen has said—and the minister has said this—that he is not going to leave the LNP, because he was assured that the LNP in this chamber would get this bill passed. He made that absolutely clear. It is not just George Christensen. It could be that the LNP needs to keep the member for Whitsunday from wandering off as well. We have heard the member for Whitsunday rail against the red army, but we know his heart's true desire is to join the member for Buderim in the 'Red-haired Army'. No matter what the LNP thinks of him, they cannot afford to let him sign up.

Let me make this prediction. The LNP may appease this far right splinter, but they will leave anyway. The LNP will be left without numbers and without any economic credibility: lose, lose. If the LNP members keep trying to appease the far right, what other economic right-wing policies are they going to adopt? Will they try to appease far-right parties by adopting a flat tax base in the state, because that is what they want? Are the LNP members prepared to endanger the sound finances that we have all built up in this state just to satisfy their political whims? What other deals do the LNP members have to do to keep a majority in the federal parliament? What other grubby Canberra deals do the members opposite have to bring into this chamber? This bill is a sign that we have in the opposition a weak, fundamentally divided party that is prepared to sacrifice economic credibility to appease the far right.