




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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LABOUR HIRE LICENSING BILL

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (3.56 pm): Anyone who takes the labour of others and runs a business owes a responsibility to those who provide that labour. Most businesses we know run a business that combines the input of ideas and innovation, the land they own or lease and the plant they own and maintain with the people who provide the labour. Other businesses take an approach where they only provide the labour component but little or nothing else. They may have no place of work for workers to work and no plant or machinery for them to operate. This means that the usual direct relationship between the business and the worker is changed and instead an intermediary, the labour hire provider, acts to have this direct relationship.

It used to be that labour hire was only for temporary use—for particular projects such as the Christmas rush or extra workers needed to finish a construction project by a due date. In our hearings we heard an example that it used to be that in a small workplace, such as a doctor's surgery, when the single receptionist was on annual leave the doctor might reach out to a firm that provided temporary staff. They paid extra for these workers and, whenever possible, directly employed workers and only used labour hire in times of particular need. More recently, this has changed as some firms utilise labour hire not just for brief periods and for a few workers but for long periods and for a significant proportion of the labour they utilise. Whether this is a positive change for Queensland workers and even Queensland businesses remains an open question, and it is something that our society must critically examine.

However, this bill is limited to attempting to regulate labour hire providers who have proved not to live up to the standards we expect of an employer. Normally we can hold these breaches of labour standards against a continuing company and the assets they hold. However, in the case of some labour hire companies, they hold very few or no assets and only supply labour. It should be noted that this is not the business model of many providers—many providers value the reputation of their company and seek ongoing relationships. However, for others the exploitation of workers is a source of profit. This bill seeks to license labour hire providers and refuse a licence to those who have previously breached our labour laws, not allowing an unscrupulous individual to restart as a new provider and continue to exploit workers.

Those opposite seek to attack those who have exposed civil society groups including Australian unions which exposed the systematic exploitation and underpayment of workers. In response, we have made the sensible decision to have a licensing scheme that provides for labour hire and ensures that unscrupulous exploiters of labour will not be able to be a labour hire provider. The bill is intentionally structured to capture those who may attempt in the future to exploit loopholes.

We have heard that ideally we would see the Commonwealth follow the Queensland lead and introduce national labour hire legislation. However, sadly, the Deputy Prime Minister himself has made it clear that he is more interested in New Zealand and less interested in Queensland and protecting these vulnerable workers. We cannot let LNP indifference at a national level stop us from doing the right thing in Queensland.

Having listened to repetitive speech after repetitive speech from opposition members, we see a pattern in their arguments that can be applied to any bill where action is required for workers. Firstly, they will say there is not really a problem. They say that there really is not anything to see. Then when they hear direct evidence of people being exploited they say that it is not really a problem. The expression they use is that it is a few 'rogue operators' whom it should apply to, not standards for all.

Then they say, 'We do need to tackle the entire industry, it is worthwhile and we cannot stand with those things.' However, they say, 'If there is a solution, this is not it.' They will not have a solution but they say that this is not it. They have no action and no requirements but 'this is not it'.

Next they set up the straw man. They portray the bill to be something that it is not. They create all sorts of bogeymen in terms of where it will apply—the Endeavour Foundation—and all sorts of ridiculous things that we find offensive.

The next strategy is to misrepresent stakeholder comments. I notice the member for Toowoomba South is in the chamber and he is one who did this. They said that only socialist red ragers and the trade union movement support this bill. They attempted to say awful things about their values in wanting to look after workers. This must be one of them, and I quote—

It is clear that LHCs—

labour hire corporations—

are not treating workers properly and are placing individual growers and the industry as a whole as a reputational risk.

What socialist organisation was this? I continue—

As an overarching statement, we do support better oversight of the labour hire industry ... We will continue to push for a consistent national scheme and support the work done by the RCSA in developing a national accreditation for labour hire companies.

It is supporting exactly what the minister said. Who was this socialist group? It was Growcom. Another organisation says that they support—

... the objectives of the bill in seeking to protect labour hire workers from exploitation by providers of labour hire services and promoting the integrity of the labour hire industry in Queensland.

What socialist organisation was this? I am not sure what the initials stand for. Perhaps someone over there who knows unions better can help me. The initials are BHP. I will be honest: they did have some reservations about the application of the laws, the definitions and where it might apply. They supported it generally, and I notice that the minister has gone to great lengths to ensure stakeholders about the nature of the comments. That is No. 5 in the trick box of strategies.

No. 6 is that there is a solution but it should be done somewhere else. 'We can't do it in Queensland. It should be done internationally. Maybe Trump could do it or the Commonwealth'. The Commonwealth is failing badly in its duty. It is up to this place to stand up for Queensland workers to see that they are protected because no-one else is going to do it. No-one else is putting their hand up.

Lastly—and this is an old favourite of the LNP whenever it has nothing else to say—they have a rant about unions, and boy oh boy did we not see it this time. We saw them go on and on. There were no facts. There was no detail. Stakeholders from Growcom, BHP and other companies gave important and worthwhile feedback. What made me angry about this process when people misrepresented what stakeholders said was that none of them mentioned the Salvation Army. In The Freedom Partnership: End Modern Slavery project, the Salvation Army put in a submission and looked in detail at the way workers were housed, paid, accommodated and shut off from the rights of ordinary Australian workers. This is something that they refused to speak about, and it is fundamentally dishonest to other members of this House.

We have seen some gross breaches of our labour laws. We have seen appalling treatment of workers and we must act. We must not listen to the false construction of straw men and false arguments that have been put forward by the opposition. Instead we must act in this place. One of the members of the LNP whom I spoke to said, 'We see this every week in my area.' I urge all members to listen to those who have been hurt and to support the licensing of labour hire operators.