




Speech By
Linus Power

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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BUILDING INDUSTRY FAIRNESS (SECURITY OF PAYMENT) BILL

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (4.27 pm): I stand to speak in favour of the Building Industry Fairness (Security of Payment) Bill. The background to this bill is a personal story for the families of so many tradies—the families who work together operating as small businesses, who do the accounts, who benefit as a family unit, but who also suffer as a family unit when contracts are not paid. I do not wish to deeply personalise these stories, but my family knows of the wife who fronts up at Christmas time demanding payments that have not been made for months, knowing that they will not have Christmas presents if payments are not made, the family who saved for years while working in the mine in the hope of starting a small business back in Brisbane, yet when they come here they do not have the power to get paid for the hard work that they do and have to lose the investment they made in plant and equipment. That is a story of the powerful versus the powerless. It is about big businesses that can push the risk of a project on to those tradies who can least afford it. It is about big business making someone else pay for their own mismanagement on a project or their own underbidding on the original project.

I know this firsthand. In Logan, so many tradies work their guts out for their families and to build this state. They know they are vulnerable. One subcontractor who spoke to me before we even began this process of formulating the bill spoke to me about working for a large civic construction project where he hauled dirt with his small fleet of trucks. He spoke to me about how vulnerable he felt, how he had outgoings—wages, truck payments, repairs and diesel—and he thought that people should be paid but there were those who would do nothing to pay him. He felt a huge pressure on his shoulders to make his business work and he knew that these losses were being transferred onto him and his family.

All we are asking is to create a level playing field for small businesses such as this hauler. Make it fair for the powerless. Last week I rang this hauler, whose name is John. He said that he was only working by himself now. He hoped that what we were doing would make a difference. He was cynical. He thought that big business would always try to exploit those who were less powerful. He said, 'Everyone knows that I am the most anti Labor person you could meet, but I'm going to tell people you're having a go for people.' I can say clearly that the minister is having a go for the powerless, to give them a fair playing field when they do hard work for Queensland.

One of the speakers on the other side spoke of this as a punishment of the many for the few. I do not doubt that there are good family and corporate businesses where making fair payments is part of their business model. They will not be punished by this bill. They are in a market where those who exploit the system, who refuse to make fair payments, are the ones who will be punished and those who do the right thing will benefit. Those who abuse the system are the ones who are hurting those who try to do the right thing. How many lead contractors have wondered, 'How can they bid so low? How can I not get that business? I am trying to do the right thing. I know how much the costs are, but they can underbid me.' Often they are being punished by laws that allow the exploitation of ordinary tradies. They intend, as part of their business model, to rip off subcontractors or, at a minimum, pass on the risk.

We heard criticism that there was not support for this bill. People like Les Williams and Juanita Gibson from the Subcontractors Alliance, the National Fire Industry Association, the Master Plumbers—that is not the plumbers' union; that is the Master Plumbers—are people who work hard in a skilled business but fundamentally are employers for the most part. The Master Electricians, the Master Plumbers, the Air Conditioning & Mechanical Contractors' Association, the Master Contractors know that their members who are small business people benefit because they try to do the right thing by their workers and should not have to suffer when contracts are not paid.

Labor always seeks to work for the powerless. We seek to stand up for those in the contractual situation in this case where they do not have the power to get paid fairly for the work that they do or even get paid for the contracts they sign on the timeline they sign. I congratulate the minister. This is about giving power to those who deserve to have a fair chance in Queensland society. We are giving it a go. We will always find the other side standing up for the powerful. They will stand up for those who exploit others. They will always find an excuse for why these things cannot be done. I am glad we are standing up for those who are powerless in the contractual situation in the construction industry and giving fairness to those families who rely on being paid fairly and on time. I commend the bill to the House.