




Speech By
Bruce Saunders

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

Record of Proceedings, 9 September 2020

**CRIMINAL CODE AND OTHER LEGISLATION (WAGE THEFT) AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Mr SAUNDERS** (Maryborough—ALP) (12.26 pm): I rise to support the Criminal Code and Other Legislation (Wage Theft) Amendment Bill 2020. Firstly, I thank the minister and the government for bringing the bill before the House, because in my electorate this is a very big issue. The McKell Institute described wage theft in the following terms—

Wage theft can take a number of different forms but generally relates to employers deliberately not paying employees their full entitlements including superannuation, award and penalty rates, leave and other employee entitlements. Wage theft should be distinguished from accidental errors, where an employer makes a genuine one-off mistake in the provision of entitlements. Wage theft occurs when the employer knows, or should be expected to know, of the employees' rightful entitlements and yet does not afford the employee these full entitlements. Wage theft can also occur in less direct ways, such as through the termination of an enterprise bargaining agreement which may revert workers back towards a lower award wage.

I was a member of the committee that released the report titled *A fair day's pay for a fair day's work? Exposing the true cost of wage theft in Queensland*. Some of the things that that committee heard were pretty daunting and I know many people who come through my electorate office feel the same way. One person who gave evidence to the committee stated—

Working in excess of 100 hours some weeks. Never less than 60 hours. Only paid 40 hours and they make me put 40 hours on timesheet. Competition has up to four guys doing my job. My company just has me. Culture is suck it up and do it. Other staff have complained and either been fired shortly after or verbally harassed as having no commitment to the company.

I have heard that said many times by people who come to my office to complain about their wages. Many of those people have been told, 'You'll never get another job in this town.' I have heard that story in my office many times since 2015.

Another submitter to the committee stated—

For 12 months I was not paid my travel allowance (\$9 a day which is a lot of money as a third year apprentice). I was employed by a group training organisation. After contacting fair work I was told they couldn't do anything. The employer would not answer my calls or return emails. It wasn't until the electrical trades union had to get involved on my behalf was this issue resolved. I know I wasn't the only one but I was the only one to pursue the issue and receive a back pay.

That is why they do not like unions! We have heard those opposite talk about the unions that look after the business community, such as the CCIQ and so on. That is okay—we can talk about those—but we cannot talk about people who look after workers' entitlements and awards. I found it interesting to listen to speakers from the other side. We know it hurts our economy if a worker does not get their full rate of pay because that money is not spent in the community. We know that happens. I have had in my office people who have been told, 'We will only pay you so much an hour, but if you go on the dole that will lift your wage up a bit.' That is unfair, yet those opposite say that they are worried about small business.

We are not after the small businesses that genuinely make a mistake. We are after the companies that make this their business plan—it is in their business plan to rip workers off—or do not allow unions through the door, or if a staff member does speak up they are immediately sacked or told that they are not on the shift for the next week and every time they ring up they are not on the roster. This is good legislation, no matter what those on the other side say.

One of the interesting comments at the public hearing was from Mr Stephen Smith. He said that the wage theft was not significant. Over 450,000 workers have had their wages attacked in the last 12 months. Is that not significant? I think it is. Could you imagine if we had 450,000 workers go on strike? They would be tearing the house down, but it is okay for 450,000-odd workers not to get their full pay!

As part of the Palaszczuk government, I am very proud to be on the committee that examined this legislation. I thank the minister for standing up for workers in this great state. This is what a traditional Labor government does. I commend the bill to the House.