




Speech By
Linus Power

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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MOTION

Australian Building and Construction Commission

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (5.10 pm): This morning I was saying to the member for Macalister that lately we have not really had our normal rant about the unions and the CFMMEU. The member for Macalister did not really respond. I said I thought it was probably because those opposite are taking the challenges that this state faces, such as COVID and the industries it has affected, seriously. What happened only moments later was that the member for Kawana dumped the typical rant on us. I say to newer members of this place that we see this week in week out from the member for Kawana because those opposite on the front bench have no new ideas and nothing to say.

One would have thought during COVID that those opposite would have had something insightful to say, that they would have looked anew at the challenges we face in the state, indeed the challenges we face in the entire world, but we hear nothing. This is exactly the same as they could have said any other week of any other year for the last five years. Many times the LNP creates a bogeyman of one particular union, but these laws are not just targeting a particular site or a particular union, they target workers in the building sector as a whole and reduce their rights. That includes our electricians, our plumbers, the tunnellers, the plant operators, civil and civic, as well as those building our schools and our apartments.

The minister stated that the ABCC cost \$33.9 million in 2019-20. That is a huge amount of money to create a bureaucracy to attack workers. It is important to examine the coercive powers of the ABCC. Workers should be subject to the same laws as everyone else but they are not, they are subject to special laws. They are required to attend an examination before the ABCC commissioner and answer questions provided under oath or affirmation. There is no right to silence and no right to representation by a lawyer of the worker's choice. Does that sound worker friendly to members? Workers face a penalty of six months imprisonment for failing to comply with the requirements to produce documents or information or to attend to answer these questions. Ordinary workers who are doing their job, never accused of any criminal action, not even accused of a civil breach, can be hauled in and interrogated with no representation. Is that what Australian tradies deserve? The LNP seems to think so.

In a review of the law in the Australian Journal of Labour Law, Williams and McGarrity said there is less protection in the act than in the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act. There are less protections for ordinary tradies than terrorists. We know that there should be protections and oversights on all of our government bodies. There are over foreign spies and terrorists, but less when it comes to investigating Aussie tradies. They also noted that the director of ASIO must seek judicial approval and the consent of the relevant minister before issuing a warrant to question an individual. When it comes to hauling a tradie in and them being faced with a threat of six months jail, that is at the unchecked discretion possessed by the ABCC commissioner.

Ms Grace: They are more lenient on drug runners than on workers.

Mr POWER: This is what they are focused on. It makes one cynical. We have all seen how the LNP let off their banker mates and said the ACCC will be the one prosecuting them. We know the ACCC does not have their powers. They protect the rights of their banker mates, but they will take away the rights of builders' labourers. Often these powers are used to investigate civil breaches rather than anything that could be said to be a breach of criminal law. Some would say that is exactly what the LNP wanted. They wanted a \$32 million taxpayer funded organisation that takes away the rights of particular people and harasses them because they perceive them as their political enemies. Certainly the member for Kawana perceives them as their political enemies. It is those people they target. I warn anyone who is not in the building industry that first they came after their perceived enemy in the building industry, next they will come after you. We should reject the ABCC as a politically funded organisation.