




Speech By  
**Linus Power**

**MEMBER FOR LOGAN**

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### **INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (4.21 pm): I do not really know how to respond to that, Mr Deputy Speaker. I want to reflect on the day that my late father retired. My late father had achieved much in his working career. He was a teacher of the deaf and then an academic. He worked on early childhood education and the acquisition of language. I was extremely proud of his commitment to teaching and the deaf community. The strange thing is that, at his retirement—the union came along with a mug—one of the things that he said to his fellow workers was, ‘One of the most important things you can do every day at work is look after your fellow workers.’ He was the sort of man who was always on committees. He was always talking about the way casualised workers were treated. Despite having achieved so much, what he wanted to remind people of was the many hours we spend with our colleagues and that how we treat them and how they are treated is really important.

I say that because there are all these slurs about why we are motivated to do this and why we believe in trade unionism. It is deep within our families and our families’ histories. It is about how we respect others in our society and in our workplaces. I know that it is on their talking points, but for many of us it is deeply offensive. We do this because we deeply believe it is the right thing to do for Queenslanders. Organisations that represent workers should have at the heart of their intent the democratic structures that are part of the Industrial Relations Act. They should have at the heart of their intent a desire to make life better for workers and not, as we have heard, an attempt to undermine workers’ organisations in the long term. Before I started my speech proper I wanted to reflect on that.

Since I have been a member of parliament, we have seen some pretty radical changes to the way that people can be employed. It used to be pretty simple. A company or perhaps the government would directly employ somebody. You knew who your workers were and you knew who your employer was. Then, at times of peak flow, some companies would employ temporary workers. We understood that. There began to be a business for intermediaries that employ contracted workers. Then we saw that some companies changed all of their workforce to contracted workers. They no longer directly employed people so that there was always a buffer between the person who was building the enterprise and profiting from the workers and the workers themselves.

Now a lot of companies have moved to the so-called gig economy model where an app directs workers, often through an algorithm. The relationship was that you knew the company you worked for, you knew your line manager and you even knew who your boss was. You would know who they were and you could tell them what was happening. Now you stare at your phone and you wonder where your directions are coming from. Do they come from an AI app or an algorithm? Do they come from somebody who has done a study in the United States on the way that people behave when faced with certain choices on an app? Members should think carefully about the contribution of David Peetz, which is definitely worth reading, and also the TWU report that goes into the specifics of the reality of this in Queensland.

Almost all of these companies are multinational companies that seek to introduce new technology. I do not see that their aim is to improve productivity; often they are there to get around regulation or, in some cases, to make the administration of regulation impossible. This arbitrage is to

make profits by moving the costs to their workers, such as the cost of plant and equipment and the cost of insurance. Of course, they also move costs to others such as road users who are endangered by long hours and low pay and, ultimately, to the government and the taxpayers of Queensland. It is not just the LNP who is influenced by the supposed productivity of apps; over time we have failed to see any actual gain and now we are looking for better ways to protect workers and the public.

As I said, Professor Peetz's contribution is worth reading. He outlines the clear case for a fair and especially safe race. He states that gig workers are controlled by apps. It is not the type of work that can support a family or build a home. Only 25 per cent of gig workers said it was their main job. Professor Peetz stated—

There is ample international evidence of low payments amongst gig economy workers. There is nothing special about independent courier drivers that makes them exempt from such low rates of pay in the absence of appropriate legislation.

'Gig economy' work provides essential income for a minority of participants.

As I said, only 25 per cent of gig workers said it was their main job and that is because of the way they structure it.

Companies try to hide the real costs from their employees. Recently I was reading about an app that has been designed to inform gig workers of the underlying costs of their work and their real wages. You put in information about your car or vehicle, the state and cost of your tyres, the cost of fuel and, of course, the time you spent in preparing and waiting. The app would then give an automated view of how much money you were making per hour. Of course, this is the internet. We are providing greater information. Because these companies are into the brave new world of the internet and information, one would think they would embrace their workers having that information. However, it has been revealed that, in some cases, workers are earning well under the minimum wage, although they do not understand that in the moment of earning those wages.

We see advertising on TV about how much you can earn an hour, but that does not reflect the underlying costs of insurance, tyres and, of course, the cost to the economy in general when people are injured by the long hours they are forced to work because of the low wages. The companies did not embrace that information. Instead, they changed the algorithm to make it impossible for the app to process the data. In some cases, they sued the app maker to prevent the information getting through to their workers.

There is not the transparency that is required for workers to understand what they are engaging with. Well may they want to hide those real costs. They do want to hide those real costs, because we understood that only a quarter work full-time and that 62 per cent said it was not enough to save for leave or superannuation. Again, that is a transfer of profits from the Queensland government and the Australian government across to these multinational companies which are not taking responsibility for it. David Peetz said, 'Pay in the gig economy is low and often below minimum wages.'

In its submission the Transport Workers Union said that, when a client continues with the underlying pressure from the top supply chain, gig operators then have to open a new front by unfairly competing with transport operators through highly exploitative work practices. There is a vicious cycle. Even those companies that are in that old model of employer to employee have to try to compete against those being driven harder and harder by an algorithm and a faceless app.

Workplace health and safety said that time pressures were the two most important factors in the food delivery industry. Gig companies are now moving into heavier freight. That itself is a danger because we see that over time when there is pressure on workers to work harder there are safety concerns. The Minister for Transport, who I know is keenly aware of this, knows that if drivers are driving too long or too hard it does put a danger both to themselves but, just as importantly, other drivers and users of our road network who have not made any of these decisions. We know that this is pushing owner-drivers into more and more precarious situations and the companies themselves into worse situations.

I urge members of the House to consider those details. I recently spoke to a member of the Christian community who—

*(Time expired)*