




Speech By  
**James Lister**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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Record of Proceedings, 20 March 2024

**WORK HEALTH SAFETY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (3.20 pm): What a wicked corruption this bill is. What a disgrace that we have members of the Labor Party who are—all of them, I understand—in one way or another, in receipt of support from the union movement. This bill is a wholesale destruction of the right of choice for workers. It benefits the financial benefactors of the Labor Party in the trade union movement and it disadvantages the competitors of those benefactors. I say that anybody in this House who is in receipt of funding for campaigns or in-kind support—union staff paid to work on their campaigns, conduct research or something like that—who will vote in support of this bill should think very carefully about how that looks.

I say that it is inappropriate for those who are beneficiaries of the additional money that the trade union movement will get. I am talking about not just those who openly declare that they are affiliated with the Labor Party but also those who publicly claim that they do not support any political parties. I have seen the Queensland Teachers' Union's website claim that they do not support any political party. That is nonsense because, as the member for Kawana quite correctly said, they channel funds for the purposes of the Labor Party and Labor Party politicians—for their campaigns, their preselections and so forth—through the Queensland Council of Unions. If we want to talk about a Ponzi scheme, that is a wicked corruption. It is a circular economy of money where the Labor Party comes into this place and uses the levers of government contrary to the interests of workers—taking away their choice—in order for the union movement to pay for their campaigns, provide them with their preselections, provide them with their selections for ministries and even tell us who will be Premier. I think 'Blocker' Bullock had a role in that. I say that any member of this parliament who has enlivened those conflicts of interest has no business in supporting this bill. It is totally inappropriate.

The member for Redlands tabled a document and said that it was a submission made by a judicial officer to a previous bill. I say that no judicial officer has any business involving themselves in the formulation of legislation in this parliament and that the separation of powers works both ways. We heard about the independent review. The member for Kawana spoke very eloquently about how we have very little faith in the independence of that review because, as is often the case, the independent review is conducted by people who are Labor luminaries, friends of the trade union movement and so on. Added to that suspicion is the fact that none of the submissions or the identity of the submitters to that review were made public. I am pretty sure that the red unions were not asked to engage with them and provide input. I might say, by the way, that I am a proud member of the Independent Workers' Union of Australia, a red union.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr LISTER:** I hear members interjecting that they are not unions. I remember that in the committee hearing I put it to one of the unions: if the test of whether a union is able to properly advocate for the rights of its members is whether it is registered or not, wouldn't you support a registration process for other associations in order that they might be subjected to the strictures and the oversight that they all talked about and that the minister talked about in her second reading speech? The answer came

back, 'No. No, we oppose that.' That gets to the nub of the issue here. It is not about protecting workers; it is about creating and protecting a monopoly for trade unions who, one way or the other, finance the campaigns, provide the preselections and provide the ministerial selections for members of the Labor Party in this place. That is what it is about.

Earlier I was speaking to the member for Warrego about this and she made the very pithy observation to me that we have a government that has created a select committee to look into the duopoly of the supermarkets—as we know, when you concentrate the sources of supply, prices go up and service goes down—yet the government is trying to eliminate competition and choices for workers as to who will be assisting and representing them in workplace health and safety matters. This is one virtuoso slap in the face for workers that says, 'You don't know best but the trade union knows best, so we're going to prevent you from having a choice. We're going to impose trade union representatives on you, even if you don't want them to be involved.' That is really regressive stuff.

The minister spoke at length about the strictures, the supervision and the standards that have to apply to organisations in order to be registered. On the one hand they are saying, 'No, you can't let other associations or red unions, for instance, be registered. They are not up to standard. That could not happen,' yet we have heard about the CFMEU and their unlawful conduct, which has been catalogued at length in this place and others over many years. I have not seen them deregistered. If registration is supposed to be the assurance of good conduct, what is the Labor Party doing about the CFMEU? What is the system doing about misconduct of the kind that was mentioned by submitters to this particular bill?

I emphasise the point made by the member for Kawana earlier. He said that one of the submitters, the representative of the Australian Meat Industry Council—I am sure the member for Buderim knows, having been an abattoir worker, like the member for Kawana—said that it is decades since union representatives in that industry have been drawn from people who kill cows or who are boning meat products from animals in the abattoir industry. This fiction that the best representation will come from some union hack that has been foisted on the workers is utter nonsense. It is trying to gain access, trying to get someone in there who can cause troubles and who can threaten stoppages and interventions in order to do some sort of deal with the employer. We heard that about the CFMEU. I think one of the submitters talked about a case where the CFMEU on the Sunshine Coast or Caboolture had intervened to stop a concrete pour, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. Those are the sorts of coercive and intimidatory tactics that we see when unions flex their muscles unlawfully. The idea that registration is the only way that workers can be protected properly is a nonsense, because we can see that registration does not curtail unlawful conduct by the friends of the Labor Party.

Workers deserve a choice and increasingly they have been making that choice. They have been walking away from registered trade unions—the ones that provide money to the Labor Party—and joining organisations like the Teachers Professional Association of Queensland and the Nurses Professional Association of Queensland. They charge not much more than half the price of their equivalent Labor Party supporting unions. Where does the difference go? I would hazard a guess that it is all of the extra staff that the union puts into working in the back offices of Labor Party members to try to get them over the line, doing research for Labor Party purposes and running third-party campaigns. When you do not do those things, you can actually afford to run the organisation and to provide services, insurance and advocacy for workers at not much more than half the price. That is the nub of the matter. We are talking about dollars.

The whole idea that this is to look after the interests of workers and improve workplace health and safety is a total fiction. It is about money. It is about those flows of money that I spoke about before, collected by the trade union movement, with a monopoly gifted to them by the Labor government, which flows back into supporting the re-election of Labor Party members of parliament and the selection of those members to be in the ministry. In any other context this would be seen as corrupt conduct. I think any local government councillor who were to enliven the conflict of interest like this and vote or advocate for measures in council that would disadvantage the opponents of their benefactors and reward their benefactors would probably find themselves in front of the CCC. I think this bill is a stain, even by Labor Party standards. This is the second bill we have seen in recent times that has tried to monopolise access to workplaces and I think it should be voted down.