



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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ELECTORAL LAWS (RESTORING ELECTORIAL FAIRNESS) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (5.04 pm): I rise to make my contribution on the Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill. The title of this bill is another spectacular misnomer. Others have made the point, and I will reiterate it briefly, that this bill was introduced at the very end of the sitting year last year. Public submissions were set to be submitted by 2 January, hearings were held at a very difficult time of the year for stakeholders and there was no appearance from the CCC to support their written submission. Clearly, there are massive issues with the committee process. It is little wonder that the LNP did not want any scrutiny of this bill, given that it makes developer donations to political parties and candidates legal again, quadruples the caps that currently exist on political donations and removes the voting rights of anyone serving more than one year in prison.

I will start at the top and talk about the return of developer donations, which are undeniably a corrupting influence on politics here in Queensland. The LNP are very deliberately making developer donations legal again, but only to the state government. Do not worry. There is nothing to worry about there. They are trying to convince us that we need not worry about it because of the recommendations in the Belcarra review—never mind the fact that the Belcarra report only addressed local government concerns. It only looked at complaints and issues around local government elections.

I will read one of the comments that was made in that report. If we take the reasoning, it makes good sense of why we need bans at a state level as well. The review said—

... the inevitably close connections between property development interests and local government decision-making mean that transparency is insufficient to manage the risks of actual and perceived corruption associated with donations from property developers.

Remember, this is in a report that only addressed local government corruption concerns. When we talk about perceived corruption risk and decision-making around development interests, the state government controls the shape of the Planning Act. It controls the caps that exist on infrastructure charges paid by developers. The state government controls tax concessions, like the build-to-rent and land tax concessions handouts that we have seen in recent years. It controls major development approvals whether through a PDA—a priority development area—or a call-in. It decides whether public land will remain in public hands or be sold off, like it is being sold off week in and week out by the LNP at the moment. It determines whether or not affordable housing requirements will be imposed on developers.

The Deputy Premier told us recently—and perhaps it was repeated even as recently as last week—that the LNP had to ditch housing affordability requirements for developers in the Woolloongabba PDA and they were not going to impose them elsewhere on newly privatised state land no less because the developers did not like it—shock, horror! Imagine that! Cry me a river, the developers do not want to have to build affordable housing. They do not want to have to address the shortage of public or social housing because it might impact their bottom line, their profitability.

A quick reminder for the government and for the Deputy Premier in particular: you are in government. You are the ones who decide what the rules are, not the developers. Let's take another example. Murderers do not like the Criminal Code. They do not like being locked up, but does the government remove the offences? No. Who exactly does the government work for? I think this bill makes it pretty clear who the government works for, and I am sure the Deputy Premier is looking forward to collecting his tidy little cheque for the handouts soon enough.

It does not take a genius to work out why developers donate to political parties. It is not rocket science. It is especially clear when you look at the lengths they went to to squeeze over \$500,000 through a loophole to the LNP immediately before the state election—I am talking in this instance about Adani and the reporting that came out recently. Of course, Labor can claim some credit for introducing the ban on developer donations, but they should not get too high and mighty, given there were massive loopholes left in those laws and they have continued to take developer donations at the federal level, as I understand it.

There are so many other corporate donations that do influence government decision-making like this. The only party that is not taking these corporate donations is the Greens. I heard the diatribe from the member for Cooper before. She claims that somehow this is untrue. I put the challenge to her that if there is any evidence that the Queensland Greens take corporate donations—because they certainly have not in the time that I have been in this place—she should stump up the evidence. She should tell us what she is talking about. I have put on the record here that the Queensland Greens do not take corporate donations. She could write to the Speaker and put me up for deliberately misleading parliament, but she cannot because it is the truth.

The answer to the question asked earlier is that we are supposed to govern in the interests of regular people. If those regular Queenslanders thought they were struggling with rent increases or with an impossibly big mortgage then the big developers of Queensland have news for them, because it is actually they who are the victims here! We heard this staggering line of argument from the Property Council of Australia in their submission decrying the demonisation of the property sector in recent years. It makes me so sad. I am so sad for them that they have been demonised! These are the same years that Brisbane house prices grew to become some of the least affordable in the world. Poor developers! These are the same years that the federal government spent more on tax concessions for landlords than on social housing, homelessness and rent assistance combined. These are the same years that our good friend—their mate—Harry Triguboff, the founder of Meriton, was, in his own words, 'holding a lot more' than he was selling, literally keeping homes off the market waiting for their value to rise. We are supposed to somehow worry about the demonisation of property developers and the development sector as a whole.

This is the LNP that we are coming to know better and better every time. This is the LNP that do not work for you. They talk about affording the property industry equal opportunity and freedom of expression in our electoral contests, but what they really mean is freedom for the development industry to influence their decisions and to corrupt political institutions and government decision-making processes. The Greens do not take corporate donations because democracy is for everyday people; it is not for corporations. Developers should not be able to fund our politicians because their motivations—profiteering off desperation in a worsening housing crisis—directly contradict the needs of the communities we represent.

I want to turn to the changes to voting rights. The bill adds new rights for property developers and political parties but simultaneously takes them away from prisoners. Anyone serving more than a year—that is more than 2,500 Queenslanders—will have their voting rights removed. This is a totally arbitrary threshold. The Human Rights Act says that the right to participate in public life and to vote should be enjoyed without discrimination.

We saw nothing in the statement of compatibility and nothing in the accompanying material to this bill to address the disproportionate impact this will have on First Nations Queenslanders. About 39 per cent of the adult prison population are First Nations Queenslanders, compared to 4.6 per cent of the population. It clearly has an imbalanced and discriminatory impact. Yes, prisoners forfeited certain rights when they were found guilty of a crime, but they are still citizens. This approach dodges accountability and creates a real catch 22 where the government makes the laws—and the LNP is absolutely hell-bent on locking more people up—but if you break them you do not get to vote on the laws that affect you. You do not get to vote these guys out. It does not sound particularly democratic to me, and I do not know how you are supposed to improve faith in Queensland's electoral system. Prisoners are some of the people most subjected to the power of the state, and they deserve the right to simply exercise their voting rights.

To wrap up, this government are hell-bent on just giving themselves more power. They want to be able to take property developer cash and they want more and more of it, too. Just like we have been struggling for years to get the Labor Party to ban donations from big coal and gas interests who are ripping us off hand over fist, from the gambling industry and from the big banks who are making incredible profits from everyday people, we need to ban these donations—but the LNP is just intent on lining its pockets year after year after year.

(Time expired)