



Speech By  
**Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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Record of Proceedings, 28 February 2019

**EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (3.39 pm): In my capacity as deputy chair, I rise to add my comments to the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee's report No. 9 titled *A fair day's pay for a fair day's work? Exposing the true cost of wage theft in Queensland*. I acknowledge the time invested by the secretariat, Hansard, committee members and others. However, the opportunity was largely wasted. As the LNP's statement of reservations says—

The LNP fundamentally believes that workers deserve to be paid what they are entitled to. No one wants to see workers being ripped off.

However, the motivations behind this inquiry have been spurious to say the least, since the very beginning.

It was obvious from the start that this inquiry had political overtones, undertones and innuendo, with its limited and selective scope that did not extend to the appalling fiasco of the Health payroll which saw thousands of nurses not paid or underpaid. It did not include underpayment of hundreds of security guards and other Commonwealth Games contractors. The Palaszczuk Labor government voted down the LNP's attempts to include these groups. How can those opposite stand there beating their chest for workers to get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work when they discriminate about who deserves it? How can this report bear the title 'exposing the true cost of wage theft in Queensland' when it does not reflect certain groups and has deliberately locked them out?

Further, this inquiry concentrates primarily on federal employment matters. Minister Cameron Dick, as the former industrial minister in the Bligh government, introduced legislation which was passed in 2009 which referred most of our industrial relations jurisdiction. He wanted the feds to take over. The LNP opposed the bill. I know; I was here. Of the 17 recommendations in this report, over half relate to federal matters where the state has no powers.

The state government is only responsible for industrial relations of state public servants and local government workers. The rest is governed by Julia Gillard's Fair Work Act, but as honourable members have just heard even though the state is responsible for public servants this Labor government boycotted nurses from the inquiry. It appears that Labor and the unions are wanting to go down the path of criminalising wage theft when the main problem seems to lie with the complexity of the award system. Penalties are already in place, but there were comments that the Fair Work Ombudsman does not have enough teeth and that there is a lack of compliance.

There was a common theme throughout the hearings from unions and related witnesses who used the term 'a business model'. It seemed to be a contrived term designed to have people believe there was some kind of conspiracy by the business community to cheat workers out of wages. There are many businesses doing the right thing, and we should remember that.

I was staggered to learn that one of the witnesses, Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, was caught for underpayments of \$925,000 over six years, yet here they were representing unions at these hearings. This, according to a representative from Master Electricians, is a classic example of 'unintentional wage

theft given the variances in work schedules and hours'. I accept that some employers do the wrong thing, as I have just revealed, but the tone of this inquiry would have us think that they are all rotten and corrupt. Queensland has over 400,000 SMEs, and the majority are passionate about their businesses, work extraordinarily long hours just to stay afloat and provide jobs for hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders. Many are not of the size and do not have the capacity to have workplace managers and the like.

Unions in regional areas were desperate to get witnesses, as local Labor MPs did not find support for their own inquiry. It was patently clear that some witnesses were totally unprepared and came along at very short notice as a result of urgent emails from their unions. Not only were some unprepared; their recollections were vague and unsupported by evidence or data. As the months progressed, the wage theft inquiry became more exposed for what it was—a recruitment organ for the unions and promotion of a wages exploitation program run by the Young Workers Hub aimed at high school students and delivered by youth under the Queensland Council of Unions banner.

As we said from the outset, the LNP fundamentally believes that workers deserve to be paid what they are entitled to. However, this inquiry was politically motivated and not inclusive of workers. If there is one person who knows all about wage theft, it is Bill Shorten. During his time with the AWU he cheated Cleanevent workers out of fair pay to the tune of \$400 million. Casual cleaners were paid \$18.14 an hour rather than \$50.17 which they were entitled to under the 2010 award—a 176 per cent pay cut.