



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION
INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT BILL 2005**

**BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION
INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT
(CONSEQUENTIAL AND
TRANSITIONAL) BILL 2005**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Thursday, 11 August 2005

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Tuckey, Wilson, MP

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Mr TUCKEY (O'Connor) (9.20 am)—Following the conclusion of my remarks yesterday, I am still very interested to draw the attention of the House and you, Mr Speaker, to the many issues that will be addressed in the Building and Construction Industry Improvement Bill 2005 and the Building and Construction Industry Improvement (Consequential and Transitional) Bill 2005: the right to gain employment in any industry without having to buy a ticket to get through the front door and the right of Australian taxpayers, who are the biggest employer group in Australia, to get value for a dollar when governments, on their behalf, move into major infrastructure commitments.

We had a classic example that I highlighted yesterday—the Mandurah-Perth railway line, a state government initiative in Western Australia, where the CFMEU have delayed the project's completion time and again. The issues are very hard to understand. There are good wages available for everybody in WA at the moment. What is more, it appears that the CFMEU's idea of a fair and reasonable wage is grossly unfair to other taxpayers on more moderate salaries who must pay their taxes to support this project.

I remind the House that in Western Australia a typical home owner is paying \$30 to \$50 a week in stamp duty on their home. Many of them are not even aware of it, because at the time of purchase that stamp duty was paid out by the bank and is now incorporated in their mortgage payments. It is an example of how state governments, confronted with the costs of infrastructure, load up their constituencies.

It is worth reiterating that, in criticising these remarks recently, the CFMEU said that they were going to call strikes of their members because some other people working for alternative employers on the job were not getting the same wages, when the other workers were apparently quite satisfied with their wages. It came out that the CFMEU workers were getting \$300 extra a week for their particular type of work. I speculated on what that might mean. Is it the difference between \$500 and \$800 a week? Is it the difference between \$800 and \$1,100 a week? We now find that it is something like the difference between \$2,000 and \$3,000 a week. As has been published in the media, a lollypop man—an obviously totally unskilled person—is getting \$90,000 a year on that job. That is not fair to the people who have to pay the taxes.

More importantly, there has been a culture of bullying, there has been a culture of bribery, and it has all been reported in the royal commission. Quite clearly, special legislation is needed. I point out again in that regard that, whilst you can address many of these corrupt issues by the tariff method, which the Hawke and Whitlam governments did—you just ship the jobs overseas and those jobs come back as men's, women's and children's clothing et cetera—a building is a bit more difficult. But, of course, the option has been taken in many parts of the world where people locate their head offices where building costs are the most reasonable. That, again, has been detrimental to many Australian workers.

Western Australia has some of the cheapest personal residential housing in Australia and, in a relative sense, in the world. There has been a good reason for that. A fellow called Len Buckeridge entered the home-building market under the brand name of BGC and took those union bullies on. History records that on one occasion he ran his car over a couple of picketers. He gave them the sort of treatment, unfortunately, that they had meted out themselves. He then vertically integrated his business. He makes just about everything he puts into a house. When I had the job of shadow minister for service personnel and I had meetings with the wives of servicemen, many of them said, 'If we can only get to Perth, if we can only get to one of the postings over there, we can afford a house.' That is because of a businessman who took these thugs on and won. He has managed to put the industry into a profitable shape, where housing costs \$100,000 to \$200,000 less than elsewhere. Surely that is a benefit to the community. It is still the case that housing of a very high standard is readily available.

One aspect of Mr Buckeridge's business was that he did not make clay bricks, so he went to Germany two or three years ago and bought a brick-making plant. At that time—when the brickworks arrived in Western Australia—because Perth is a double-brick house culture, we were starting to ship bricks in from the Eastern States—

Mr Randall—From Malaysia.

Mr TUCKEY—Yes, and from Malaysia! And as we stand here, Len is still struggling to get a site to erect his brickworks on. The state government preferred Western Australians to import bricks from Malaysia, to pay all the additional costs, rather than to let Len Buckeridge, the successful home builder for the people, make his own clay bricks. At this stage, the Commonwealth government is, through the Airports Association, giving him some assistance. That situation was absolutely ridiculous. What is more, he was helping the government out by being the cheapest builder for their public homes—for low-income earners' homes—

Mr Randall—One in three houses in WA was built by him.

Mr TUCKEY—Yes. Here he was winning tenders, and the then minister tried to stop him putting in the lower price. It was a scandal and the minister, Tom Stephens, eventually lost in the courts. Fancy a government, spending taxpayers' money, deciding it was better to pay more for houses than to let the hated antiunion builder get the job and build the houses cheaper—and the brickworks he proposed are apparently highly efficient and will reduce the cost of bricks for all Western Australians. And yet another mate of the WA government was given a block of land in Midland for a fraction of its value to build brickworks, but you can bet that is a totally union site. These are the issues. The big losers are the people of Australia, and that is why this legislation is well worth the support I give it.