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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Enterprise Migration Agreements
SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Morrison, Scott, MP

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Mr MORRISON (Cook) (15:10): Over the life of this government we have seen them declare war on all sorts of issues, as the shadow Treasurer has reminded us on other occasions: on obesity, on binge drinking, on pokies, on inflation—

Mr Hunt: On Kevin!

Mr MORRISON: And on the former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd—of course! But in the budget the Treasurer and the Prime Minister opened up a new war: a war on their fellow Australians. It was a cheap shot, and it was a pathetic attempt in seeking to demonise Australians for their wealth, for their innovation, for their entrepreneurship, for their investment, for taking a risk and for backing their own country's future. The Prime Minister and the Treasurer, in engaging in this class war rhetoric, demean themselves and, indeed, their office.

But we learned this past week that this government cannot even get a class war right. The Prime Minister and this Treasurer have outed themselves in the course of the past week as double agents in their own phony class war, earning the rebuke of Mr Howes, who has now lost his way. He is no longer sure who he is supposed to be hating anymore and who he should be demonising. Now, I have great confidence that Mr Howes will find his way very, very soon on these things—no-one hates like the Labor Party. Just ask the former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, about that.

But Labor's class war has been exposed as a phony war; a phony war that tries cynically to pitch Australians against each other to drive political advantage for an embattled Prime Minister, who will do whatever it takes to get herself out of the latest mess she has landed herself in by her own hand. The handling of the Roy Hill mine enterprise migration agreement announcements has been yet another panicked decision from a Prime Minister whose poor judgment has dropped her in yet another self-made mess.

Even when the government has the support of the coalition—the opposition—for a policy, as it has on this occasion, she still cannot get anything right. The Prime Minister and caucus have today issued a vote of no confidence in the minister at the table, Minister Bowen. There are plenty of reasons why I would normally join such a vote on those matters of no confidence in Minister Bowen, but on this occasion Minister Bowen has been hung out to dry yet again by his Prime Minister. It is not the first time that this minister has been hung out to dry by his Prime Minister; as we all recall, last year he was hung out to dry over the cabinet decision regarding Nauru and opposing that policy.

The question for the Prime Minister that I have today is: what has changed since a year ago? What has changed since over a year ago, when the enterprise migration agreement policy was put into place, that has so shocked this Prime Minister—that has so disturbed her—that she thinks that these arrangements that are now presented for the Roy Hill mine project are anything different to what would have been conceived of more than a year ago? What has changed? This policy was announced more than a year ago. Protections were built into the model for this policy: the department had to negotiate agreements within three months and the decision as to whether a project would have access to the MA was entirely at the minister's discretion, which is now compromised by the additional oversight and the lack of confidence expressed by his caucus and his Prime Minister today.

Rather than each subcontractor having to negotiate their own labour agreement, they fall under the umbrella agreement of this arrangement through the bulk negotiation that has occurred with the project owner. There is a need to develop a comprehensive training plan demonstrating how the project will invest in the upskilling of Australians to meet future skill needs in the resources sector. They have to set measurable targets for training that develop skills and occupations where there are known or anticipated shortages. Overseas labour will only be supplementary, with resources projects required to demonstrate effective and ongoing local recruitment efforts. Occupations that are not eligible for standard migration programs can be sponsored provided the project can justify a genuine need that cannot be met from the Australian labour market. Direct employers will need to comply

with sponsorship obligations, including paying Australian market salary rates. Overseas workers sponsored under an EMA will hold 457 visas and will be subject to the Migration Legislation Amendment (Worker Protection) Act 2009. Where there is evidence of widespread abuse, contractual sanctions in an EMA will allow the department to suspend or cancel an EMA and associated arrangements. Overseas workers will need to demonstrate English language proficiency and the skills and experience necessary to perform the occupation in Australia. Relevant licensing or registration requirements will also apply.

These protections were in the original policy. It is a policy that has had the support of members on this side of the House. It is a policy that was designed to produce the type of arrangement that is now before this minister and this government in terms of the Roy Hill mine project. So what has changed since that policy was announced to have this Prime Minister go to water at the time of announcement and seek to hang her minister out to dry and pretend that she knew nothing of this until last week, when all of a sudden these arrangements were somehow not going to support projects, not going to support Australian jobs and not going to be in the national interest?

The Roy Hill application was submitted before Christmas, as the minister said today. Prior to that time they had been engaged in discussion with the department to ensure that their submission was compliant. The discussion and consultation included unions—extensively—the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and ministers, and this went on for months. Is the Prime Minister seriously asking the Australian people to believe that she knew nothing about this until last week? If that is her testimony—that the Prime Minister of this country did not know about a project that was worth \$10 billion and that is going to generate at least 6,000 Australian jobs—then she is damned by her own testimony and she should resign for that reason alone, because she does not know what is going on in her government. This is a Prime Minister who should stand condemned by her own words if that is the myth that she is trying to put on the Australian people and on members of this House—a Prime Minister so distracted by her constant bumbles and self-made crises that she could not be aware of this significant project. The Prime Minister needs to get her story straight. Either she did not know and is incompetent, or she did know, has sought to mislead Australians yet again and has demonstrated that not even her own ministers can trust her, let alone the Australian people. The ministers that especially cannot trust her are the ones who voted against her and for the former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in their last leadership ballot.

It is clear that the Prime Minister did know. That is shown by the evidence put forward in the answer to the question today by the minister, confirming his briefings both to the productivity committee of the cabinet and generally through that process. Of course she knew. I may have many criticisms of this minister, but I suspect strongly that he did his job on this occasion and he did keep people informed of this. This Prime Minister has gone to water on him at the critical moment and has shamed him. She has hung him out there like a shag on a rock. Frankly, it is time for this minister to seriously take up his own advice, get an improvement in the quality of his own life and go into exile on the back bench with the former Prime Minister Mr Rudd. They can sit over there in their exiled government, because clearly this is a divided and dysfunctional government, and the events around this case purely demonstrate this.

What is the big deal here? It is not uncommon for people not to trust this Prime Minister. That is not something that is brought to this House with any sort of freshness about it in terms of the news. It is not uncommon for those on that side of the House to know that they cannot trust this Prime Minister, as this minister at the table has learnt too bitterly on too many occasions. The big deal here is this: what next? What is the impact on investor certainty and confidence in this government's ability to make a decision and stick to it? The actions of the Prime Minister have created uncertainty—not those of the minister for immigration, who on this rare occasion seems to have got something right. The minister should go into exile, as I said. I will long argue that there are many reasons he should do so, but the uncertainty created by the Prime Minister's actions is the cause here. It has created an own goal for this government, and the damage is not over yet.

As a result of the histrionics of this government and the Prime Minister in recent days, what further restrictions will now be placed on these arrangements? What additional conditions will be demanded as a result of the going to water by this Prime Minister at a critical moment when the country needed her to be strong? When will the deed to give effect to the agreement be finalised? Because, as the minister knows, that deed is still unsigned. What impact will additional conditions and delays have on this project? If it survives to that level, what will the unions do when it is time for a construction agreement to be put together for the site? Will they use this agreement—as they could—as a secondary bar to negate the impact of this agreement by once again, through that arrangement, locking out the workers that are provided for under this agreement? That is what is at risk through

the Prime Minister's bungling of yet another issue. What will this Prime Minister do if the unions take that stand, and what confidence can Australians have when she so easily folded when presented with the histrionics of Mr Howes from the AWU when unions met in this place last week and went into meltdown?

What of the other projects? What will these investors and financiers now be saying about these other projects that remain in the queue, with a mining tax, a carbon tax, withholding tax increases, and increased taxes on living-away-from-home allowances for those on 457 visas, and a Prime Minister who simply cannot be trusted not to change the rules once an agreement and an investment have been made?

This all adds up to one thing, and it is called sovereign risk. Sovereign risk is the other name this Prime Minister goes by, because this Prime Minister has done more than any in this place at any time to damage the sovereign risk assessment of this nation with the measures she has brought into this place and with her bungling, constantly, of these measures. That is the risk in the way this Prime Minister has dealt with these matters.

Take another project: Chevron's Gorgon project, which I am sure the shadow minister at the table will speak about, adds a \$64 billion net boost to Australia's gross domestic product in 10,000 direct and indirect jobs. That is one of the other agreements that sits in the queue, that will now be held up by this Prime Minister's histrionics. The anticipated state and federal government revenue is about \$40 billion.

But it is not just investor confidence that is shot. Australians do not have confidence in this government to run an immigration program with integrity. The government's inability to get anything right, especially on our borders, demonstrates that, when the Prime Minister says that Australians will get the jobs first, the Australian people do not believe her, because they do not believe this Prime Minister can implement policy.

We have had the debacles from day one with this Prime Minister and her predecessor, and this country does not trust this government to get things as important as this right. Australians are not confident that this government can implement the agreement. That is what caucus themselves have resolved today as to this minister, this policy and this government's ability to deliver that policy—a vote of no confidence in the government's ability to meet this agreement. I only have to refer to the ACTU fact sheet itself, which I would table, which goes into great detail about the government's inability, already, to police the overseeing of 457s and abuses that occur.

The other promise the Prime Minister made was that there would be increased scrutiny for these arrangements. Yet that does not gel with what the minister knows and what the department's officials said at Senate estimates last week. When Senator Waters asked:

You said that that existing monitoring program will be extended to EMAs. Will there be any additional officers or resources to cover that new area of responsibility?

the answer was:

That will be covered within the existing number of inspectors and resources.

There are no additional resources, additional staff, that the minister has allocated in this budget, in this process, to monitor the implementation of this agreement. Yet the Prime Minister is standing before the Australian people and promising that there will be increased scrutiny. But that is not backed up. It is just more hollow words. Is it any wonder that investors are increasingly looking at this country, and this government—there is nothing wrong with this country; but there is everything wrong with this government—and seeing one thing: sovereign risk, and that will not change until this government is voted out of office and we can have investors investing in this country with confidence, knowing the rules will not be changed. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Was the member for Cook seeking to table a document?

Mr Morrison: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is leave granted for the document to be tabled?

Leave not granted.