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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Workplace Relations

SPEECH

Monday, 25 June 2012

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Questioner
Speaker Jones, Stephen, MP

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Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (12:07): I am pleased to be speaking on the matter that the member for Wannon brings before the House today, a matter which goes to the heart of two important issues which have been the subject of much debate over the last 4½ years. The first of those issues is how we manage to balance through our workplace laws the need for certainty on the one hand—that is, the need for certainty in relation to working hours and take-home pay—with the capacity of young people to find and engage in work, particularly part-time work, while completing their schooling.

The stories that speaker after speaker from the coalition side got up and entertained the House with this morning would be compelling if they were the only side of the story. When you stand here and you talk about the needs of ensuring that you have a workplace relations system that enables a 14- to 16-year-old student to knock-off from school at three o'clock in the afternoon, jump on their bike or the local bus and get down to Coles or Woolies or a small hardware store in the main street of a country town and get a few hours work, a bit of pocket money and some work experience, it would be very hard to argue against that. In fact, I do not think there would be a right-thinking person on this side of the House who would argue against the importance of constructing a system which facilitates young people in this country having access to additional money and the value of work experience while completing their schooling.

However, we know that these circumstances do not operate in a vacuum. Those on the other side of the House often try to approach these debates on the basis that the workplace relations system can be dealt with by simple formulas and their propositions exist in a vacuum. If all we were talking about were the 14- to 16-year-olds then there would be no conjecture, but that is not all we are talking about. On the same hand, we are also talking about the many hundreds of single mums living in my electorate or older people working in the retail and related sectors, who need some certainty about the minimum number of hours they are going to work. If you have to travel on public transport for an hour and a half to get to your place of employment and then for an hour and a half to get home, you want to be pretty sure that you are not going to be spending more time on the bus than you are behind the counter. You are not being paid for your time on the bus—in fact, you are paying to get to work.

That is why on this side of the House we understand that you need to construct a workplace relations system that is able to bring into a happy medium these two competing needs. We on this side of the House do not believe that in this day and age, in a wealthy country like ours, it must be necessary that one person's benefit should be bought at the detriment of another worker. We look for solutions that ensure that the benefits that you provide to one worker do not cut the throat of another. That is why I am very pleased to say that we have scrapped Work Choices. We scrapped the system of AWAs where you had the fiction that a 16-year-old could sit down and negotiate with the head of Coles or Woolworths and come to a happy arrangement and they had some bargaining power in that—we got rid of that. That is what those opposite are advocating.

The member for Canning admitted in a debate I had with him on TV a few weeks ago that they had a secret industrial relations policy but they were not going to tell anyone about it. If they were really going to come clean, they would let people know what their policies were. Whilst I am on it, if they are interested in providing school-aged children with education and work skills, they will get behind our trade training centres, because that is where real skills and real workplace experiences are being garnered.

Opposition senators interjecting—

Mr STEPHEN JONES: Instead of interjecting and making all the noise that they are making at the moment, like empty cans do, they would be informing themselves about the benefit of the trade training centres, with \$2.5 billion being spent over 10 years and 370 projects, with 146 already built and operating and about 88 already underway, providing real education and skills to workers today.

Debated adjourned.