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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Budget

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Hayes, Chris, MP

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Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (16:11): I thank the member for Gorton for his MPI topic of failing to protect the living and working conditions of Australian workers. Member for Gorton, is that not saying the bleeding obvious when we are dealing with this government? How can you trust this Prime Minister after he said, 'We will not touch working conditions'? Do you trust him? Those on the other side have not said, 'Yes,' because they know that they, like he, are part of the party of WorkChoices. Some of us were here when they introduced this legislation into the parliament. They brought it in here, they did not want to debate it—no mandate—but when we finally got to the detail those opposite were embarrassed. When they looked at the detail they found for the first time in Australian history that they had made it legal to pay people below the minimum award rate.

That is the party of WorkChoices. When the Prime Minister says, 'Trust us, we are not going to touch working conditions'—

Ms Butler interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Griffith is not in her seat.

Mr HAYES: it is not a very smart move because these people have form. They have form; it is in their DNA. We know what they want. They actually call it 'flexibility'. They do not come in here to say, 'We want to cut working conditions' or 'We want to strip the minimum rates of pay,' but they do come and say: 'Look, for the productivity of the nation, we need flexibility.' The member for Mitchell over there, who is in the Prime Minister's pocket, was one of those who tried to urge the Prime Minister to get stuck into workers. They do not like the idea of 'We are not going to touch workers' pay and conditions' because they really have an agenda. They want to get back to where they were.

Just think about it: at the time they introduced WorkChoices there was exponential growth in one sector of our economy—senior executives' salaries. They were unrestricted and they went through the roof. They prefer to attack vulnerable workers—people on minimum rates of pay—and they made it legal to pay them below the minimum rate. That is what they did. As much as they whinge and bleat about it, they have history. If you want to be proud of that, put your hands up for that history

I know the population out there did not exactly see it the same way as that. Nail your colours to the mast! Be honest with yourselves! You are the party of Work Choices. It is your history. I know that more recently the Prime Minister had his minister for workplace relations, Senator Abetz, instigate a new Productivity Commission inquiry. What do you think he got them to do that inquiry on?

Mr Giles: Fairness, maybe?

Mr HAYES: No, it wasn't fairness.

Mr Giles: Boosting living standards?

Mr HAYES: No. They said: 'Let's have an inquiry into the workplace laws of this country. Let's open it up so that we look at everything in the workplace, including minimum rates and penalty rates.' You would not have done that if you were not intent on getting back to where you were. It is like a dog returning to its vomit; it really is. It has gone back to where it wants to belong. It shows its true colours. It wants to get back to Work Choices, otherwise it would not have done it. This time they want to be able to come into this place and say: 'It wasn't us. We are simply implementing the recommendations of the Productivity Commission.' That is what they want to do. Just think about it. They want to say: 'Trust us. We're not going to touch wages.' Why don't you ask the cleaners when they visit your office here at night, or, if you get in here early enough—and I know the member for

Mitchell does—ask them in the morning, 'Have their wages been touched by this government?' Those opposite know what the answer is. That is why they have not asked them. The answer is: they have.

Do not forget these are the same people who said: 'There'll be no cuts to health, no cuts to education, no cuts to pensions, no cuts to the SBS and the ABC'—all that sort of stuff. They do not take these promises all that seriously. So, when they stand up here and say, 'We will not touch the working conditions of Australian workers,' do you want to believe them?

Opposition members: No!

Mr HAYES: They can't. And those opposite want to go quiet on that because they know that they have form. They have allowed the stripping away of award conditions in the past. They have allowed people on minimum rates of pay to be affected. Now they want the Productivity Commission to do it on their behalf. Shame, Tony Abbott.