



Speech by

Mr P. PURCELL

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

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BUILDERS LABOURERS FEDERATION; WALTER CONSTRUCTION GROUP

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (7.22 p.m.): I would like to talk about the benefits of belonging to a union, particularly the benefits of belonging to a very strong union such as the Builders Labourers Federation. It recently conducted a trial on a job with the Walter Construction Group. People say that you cannot return to the good old days. However, I say that you can if you belong to the Builders Labourers Federation or another union.

On the Walter Construction Group job, they turned the clock back to work a five-day week. The purpose of the experiment was to improve the quality of life for workers and management in the building and construction industry, where a lack of weekend time with their families is the accepted norm. Initially, Allan Robertson and Greg Packer from Walter Construction Group approached the BLF Assistant Secretary, Terry McIntyre, with the idea of trialling a five-day week—with the RDO inclusive—at the Woodford Correctional Centre. So it is also a benefit and a plus to the government because that is one of its projects. The answer from the union was a firm no. The RDO day was sacrosanct and non-negotiable. However, the union was prepared to back the trial by agreeing to a 19-day month, with the RDO still intact, and up to a 10-hour working day to make up for the lost time. All parties agreed.

The initial reaction from people down there was negative, but 14 months later the Woodford project is winding down some six to eight weeks ahead of schedule. The trial has proved to be a win-win situation for all involved, particularly for Walter Construction Group. Allan Robertson said that the benefits to the work force have included improved quality of life and more family time, reduced travelling time and overall savings, reduced sick leave by up to 80 per cent, improved productivity by 10 per cent to 12 per cent, higher morale, reduced injuries from fatigue and increased employment due to increased man numbers to achieve the same man hours over a five-day week. That is a jobs, jobs, jobs program.

The BLF delegate on site, Kevin Hughes, said that many workers were apprehensive about the five-day working week initially, but the entire work force ended up loving it. They were sorry to see the end of the job and were not looking forward to returning to Saturday work at all. He said that workers exchanged an average of a \$20 to \$50 a week pay loss to enjoy their Saturdays at home with their families, watch their children play football and improve their family life with their partners. Everyone agreed that they especially looked forward to the RDO weekends, when they could have a three-day weekend and get away with their family.

For a worker to refuse to belong to a union is not to exercise a democratic freedom, it is to accept benefits that others have worked for without contributing to the cost. Democracy flourishes only when freedom is accompanied by responsibility. Like I say, that job was a fully unionised job, and those people enjoyed the fruits of that by belonging to the union.
