




Speech by

Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

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HOLIDAYS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (3.04 pm): I rise in opposition to the Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. This bill is another example of the LNP government's obsession with attacking working Queenslanders. It is a sad indictment that the LNP government would come into this House and attack a public holiday that has been commemorated in May by Queenslanders since 1891, and declared a public holiday by the Queensland parliament in 1901. It has been celebrated in May in Queensland since that time.

Labour Day is an important day for working people: to gather together to advance important issues; to celebrate hard won advancements; and to pay tribute to the people who made those advancements possible over previous generations. These include important advancements that many of us take for granted these days.

What are some of the issues that Labour Day represents? What are the advancements that the Premier has such disdain for? I will list just a few. Some are: the eight-hour day; the right to negotiate as a group rather than be left out on one's own; basic and fundamental workplace health and safety; the minimum wage—the living wage as it became known; and the basic notion that men and women deserve a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. I think it is telling that the LNP has such little respect for the public holiday that represents these important milestones in Queensland's history and its core elements which have become the fabric of our society.

The significance of Labour Day being celebrated in Queensland in May was outlined by the Queensland government itself as part of the 2011 review, with its submission stating—

Labour Day has special significance for Queensland because of its link to events in the labour movement of the late nineteenth century.

One of the first Labour Day processions in the world was in Barcaldine on 1 May 1891 and the public holiday has been celebrated in Queensland on the first Monday in May since 1901.

Labour Day is celebrated by workers across the state and May 1 is deeply ingrained in Queensland's history as a day to recognise workers' rights.

As the committee report shows, this significance was also outlined in the submission by the Rail, Tram and Bus Industry Union.

A government member interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Do you want to stand up and speak? You can speak.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Cunningham): Order! I call the member for Inala and ask that members listen to her in silence.

Ms PALASZCZUK: As the committee report shows, this significance was also outlined in the submission by the Rail, Tram and Bus Industry Union. I want to share part of that submission with members now. It stated—

3. Labour Day, also referred to as “May Day” is well known to be the celebration of the achievement of the 8 hour day as well as the recognition of the role of workers in the broader economy. The terms Labour Day and May day are used interchangeably given the historical significance.
4. May Day has been celebrated in Queensland for over 100 years commemorating the first march of its kind in this state if not the country, occurring on the 1st of May 1891. Reference to the significance of this event is found in the works of many including Henry Lawson. His poem “Freedom’s on the Wallaby” was written as a comment on the march itself.
5. The movement of May Day to October would ignore the historical significance of the event.

The Queensland Council of Unions also reflected on the significance of the event. It stated—

The Labour Day celebration in May each year is of special significance to workers and the labour movement as it recognises the first ever Labour Day procession held in Barcaldine on May 1, 1891. Further, the Labour Day public holiday is an important annual event that commemorates the granting of the eight-hour day for Australian workers and remembers those who struggled and succeeded to ensure decent and fair working conditions for Queensland and Australian workers.

Whilst Labour Day is of special significance to workers it also forms part of Queensland’s history. The battles undertaken by workers in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s to achieve better working conditions are recorded as major events in the history of this state.

Moving the public holiday from May will take away the relevance of commemorating our industrial and general history on or around the anniversary of the first Labour day procession. For this historical reason the Labour Day public holiday should occur in May each year.

Further evidence of the significance of the day has been compiled by the Australian Council of Trade Unions. An extract from the ACTU website entitled ‘History of Labour Day’ provides further insight into the history of Labour Day. It states—

The linking of Labour Day to May Day occurred in Barcaldine, when on 1 May 1891 the first “May Day” procession in Queensland was held at the height of the pastoral strike. Brisbane held its first May Day March on 1 May 1893. In 1901 the day of the march was changed to the first Monday in May when it became a public holiday.

So from 1901—1901—this day became a public holiday in Queensland. What you want to do is rip that all apart and change it, and what for? For the sake of ideology.

Mr Bleijie: Joe Blow wouldn’t even know what May Day is. They just like the public holiday.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Madam Deputy Speaker, I was completely silent during the Attorney-General’s speech.

Mr Bleijie: I wish you weren’t.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Cunningham): Order! That is fine but both sides need to be silent as well then.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Thank you. The extract goes on to say—

Since the early part of this—

the 20th—

century Labour Day has continued to grow in significance in Queensland. It is now an occasion when unions, community groups, ethnic organisations and other people join in celebration.

Queensland is the only state in which the trade union movement recognises the day with major marches and activities—

not just in Brisbane but—

around the state.

It is a shame that this historic significance has not been recognised by the Premier or the Attorney-General in their positions on this bill. Nor it seems have the views of many sections of the Queensland community been taken into account. The Premier and the Attorney-General would do well to heed the concerns of some of their own backbench who recognise the importance of Labour Day to their own communities. The member for Gregory, for example, took the extraordinary step of lodging his own submission to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee—

Mr Crandon: How come union numbers are shrinking?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Condamine, I ask you to desist—sorry, member for Coomera. I apologise.

Mr Bleijie: I’ve got the latest stats.

Ms PALASZCZUK: You do not even want to hear what your member has said.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Ms PALASZCZUK: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The member for Gregory, for example, lodged his own submission to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee opposing the government’s plans to move the Labour Day public holiday. Why did he do this? Because he knows what a negative impact this decision will have in his own region. What the member for Gregory has shown in this place—and perhaps, I think, following the example set by honourable men who preceded him—is that it is possible to be a passionate advocate for your own beliefs as well as showing humility, dignity and grace to others.

The member shows us that even those people who oppose the views of the Australian Labor Party and the labour movement can still respect the role of workers throughout our history. Even those who over the years disagreed with organised Labor can still celebrate the extraordinary advancement that the union movement has brought about in our society for their members and the broader community. As the member for Gregory points out in his submission—

This date in May is so much more than just a celebration of labour day to these dedicated people in the west. It is the weekend of a much organised and well planned Labour Day Festival.

This festival in Barcaldine is a much bigger event than the local agricultural show and showcases many things. There are many forms of racing held over this weekend. With country horse races and drag racing. Not to mention the very much anticipated goat races. There are many additional activities held over these few days concluding with the Labour Day parade on the Monday. In the small western communities of my electorate, these parades are supported by many organisations. The local kindergarten, schools, senior citizens, football and sporting groups to name a few. They are very much a carnival like event. Residents of close surrounding communities converge on Barcaldine to partake and be witnesses to this spectacular.

The views of the member for Gregory are shared by the Barcaldine Regional Council. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition and I had the opportunity to hear firsthand the concerns of the council when we visited Barcaldine and central-western Queensland in late August. The mayor and his council make some very good points to support the retention of the Labour Day public holiday in May. Some of the points they made in their submission to the committee include—

- The event is scheduled around other Outback events.
- There is a huge spend in other communities as people extend their holiday.
- Sponsors have done their money cold—

and the council goes on to list the businesses that have sponsored the event. They continue—

- The event is scheduled around the peak Tourist season. Motels and airfares are booked from year to year. All neighbouring communities benefit from the accommodation demand.
- The May Day parade is for all community groups ie. Senior citizens, kids, kindergarten, aged care, rugby league etc.
- The event has created a date claimer for weddings, reunions etc.
- It is recognised on Queensland Tourism's "100 Things to Do" list.

I think the facts speak loud and clear. The council does not support the change. The member for Gregory, a member of this government, does not support the change. The impact will be felt very hard in western and regional communities.

Has anyone thought for a moment why the people out in the west cannot march in October? Has anyone given that any due consideration? Because its too hot. For anyone who understands, you cannot march. Let me make it very clear to this House: the union movement, the Labor Party, the members of the opposition here will be marching in May. We will continue to march in May. We will not march in October. We will honour Queensland's history and we will march in May. We will be there in May. In force we will be there.

Mr Bleijie: Well it's a Sunday. They won't be getting paid, so that's fine. They can march in October.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Let's just call what the Attorney-General just said—'It's okay to march on a Sunday; that's fine because they won't be paid'?

Mr Bleijie: Absolutely. They can march every day of the week.

Ms PALASZCZUK: You're a disgrace.

Mr Bleijie: As long as they have leave from their employer.

Ms PALASZCZUK: You're an absolute disgrace.

Mr Bleijie: I'm giving them October to march and they will get paid in October to march and they will march in October.

Ms PALASZCZUK: You are arrogant and you are a disgrace. These submissions highlight one undeniable point about this legislation. The government has shown a breathtaking disregard for community consultation in relation to this change. That has become a pattern. When the government weakened the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, took away the rights of workers and destroyed job security with the flick of a pen, there was no consultation. And the LNP continues to show no regard for the impact on real people and no hint of embarrassment or admission that they did not mention this once before the election. In fact, the LNP supported the public holiday arrangements put in place by the former government just some 10 months ago.

Mr Crandon: Because it was wrong 10 months ago. That's why.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Compare the current moves with the vigorous and genuine public consultation—

Mr Crandon: Your legislation was wrong.

Ms PALASZCZUK:—conducted by the former Labor government in 2011.

Mr Crandon: We're changing it now.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Coomera. You have a lot of contribution to make. I suggest you put your name on the list and get it out then. I call the member for Inala.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Hear, hear, Madam Deputy Speaker! Six weeks of consultation back then and public debate saw 24,505 Queenslanders respond to the public survey. The changes—which were outlined in a detailed discussion paper—were well considered, were part of broader changes to holidays and involved the introduction of transition provisions that Queenslanders are enjoying this year. I will not go into the discussion around changes to student-free days which formed part of the survey conducted by the government last year. But, in relation to the sensible suggestion that the Queen's Birthday holiday be moved to later in the year, 85 per cent of people supported that notion.

Mr Watts: That was a loaded question.

Ms PALASZCZUK: At least they were offered the chance to respond to a question.

Government members interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Let me recap that for members because I do not think they quite grasp the concept: 24,505 people responded. In addition, 82 per cent supported the specific idea to move the Queen's Birthday holiday to a Monday in October. The approach of the former government was inclusive and brought the community with them. The result was a sensible solution for public holidays that had overwhelming public support. The support for Labor's changes and our position on this bill is evident for the parliament. In roughly the six weeks which the Labour Day petition was online, over 2,200 Queenslanders added their name to keep Labour Day in May. But we have seen no such support for the position of the Attorney-General.

The Attorney-General confirmed under questioning in estimates that the decision to move Labour Day from its historical connection in May was not borne out of widespread consultation. The Attorney-General admitted that it was his own decision to force this change through. He effectively admitted that this is nothing but an ideological move from an Attorney-General who does the reputation of the important role of first legal officer no favours with his approach. What is even more disturbing than not consulting the people of Queensland is that the Attorney-General did not even consult his own colleagues.

I have already referenced the position of the member for Gregory, but in estimates the Minister for Local Government also admitted that he was out of the loop in relation to the change to Labour Day. In an effort to distract the public from the debacle that is the Caltabiano affair, the Attorney-General went on a weekend media blitz informing Queenslanders that Labour Day would be changed next year despite the fact that the legislation has not yet been debated in this chamber nor have the recommendations of the committee been considered—a committee dominated by LNP members.

The arrogance of the LNP on this issue was further evidenced last week when a caller to Spencer Howson's program on ABC Radio inquired about what was happening with public holidays next year—and rightly so because a lot of people including people in my electorate are calling and asking what the situation is. Mr Howson made contact with the Attorney-General's office and was advised that Labour Day would be in October next year and that the Queen's Birthday holiday would revert back to June. Once again, there was no consideration from the government that the legislation was still before this parliament and had yet to be passed. It is also clear the government must be intending to ignore the recommendations, as the Attorney-General has already outlined, of its own committee members which are contained in the committee report on this bill. This is further evidence that the LNP with its massive majority is treating this parliament with contempt. It is time the government admitted that this is nothing but a petty and ideological move by the Attorney-General and a Premier who hates anything and everything that contains the word 'l-a-b-o-u-r'.

Everybody knows that the Queen's Birthday weekend does not celebrate Queen Elizabeth's actual birthday. The move of the Queen's Birthday holiday was supported by the LNP last year and passed just 10 months ago. There is fundamentally no legitimate or compelling reason to make these changes. It dismisses the history of decent, everyday men and women who have gone before us who spent their lives fighting for a better, fairer society. Ironically, the LNP's position particularly hurts regional and rural communities. It hurts in particular rural and regional communities who proudly celebrate their history and have built up community and regional activities around this historical date. The only reason left as to why the Premier and his Attorney-General have taken this action is their attempt to stamp on the symbolism of Labour Day itself.

It reflects the incapacity of the Premier to recognise the value of those who have gone before us and his ability to be generous in spirit. As the Electrical Trades Union said so succinctly in a recent full-page advert in the *Courier-Mail*, 'Leave May Day in May, Newman. It is simply not yours to give away.' As I said before, it seems the Premier and his Attorney-General have confused their large majority with a monopoly on wisdom. Unfortunately, communities across the state are paying the price, and working men and women are suffering.

In conclusion, and as I said in my speech, the labour movement and people in Queensland will continue to March in May. We will not be marching in October. We will only be marching in May and we should leave the holiday here in May. When a Labor government returns to this place, Labour Day will be restored to its rightful place. I urge the House to oppose the bill.