




Speech by
Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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HOLIDAYS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (3.59 pm): I sometimes wonder why these types of bills are referred to a committee given the failure of the government to recognise the sound recommendations made by the committee to the Attorney-General. I am disappointed to have to make a contribution to this debate and give voice to my increasing cynicism regarding the motives and substance of this government. Unusually, as a committee member I have been obliged to express my dissent within the report provided by the committee to the parliament. So without labouring the point, I certainly do not commend this bill to the House. As I said in my short statement of dissent, the government has provided no convincing justification for introducing the bill nor any coherent rationale for amending the schedule of public holidays contained in the Holidays Act 1983 that was amended only in November 2011. That was only 10 months ago—and I say that again: 10 months ago.

What I find most astounding is that at the time those amendments went through this parliament no member of the opposition, now the government, voted against it. In fact, when that legislation went through it put out a press release in support of it. I find it simply incredible that such a reversal of temperament and ideas is all of a sudden embraced with such new-found courage and determination by members of the government. Is it now only the fact that it has 78 members that this government is prepared to awake from its slumber and take any interest in this issue or make any contribution or, in this particular case, to actually have members present in the chamber? We all know that during the last debate nobody in the then opposition fronted up for it.

There were substantial reservations expressed by the members of the committee. Some of those reservations are reflected in the recommendations that were made by the committee. So I must express some recognition of the evident common sense of those members of the committee. It is indeed unfortunate that their influence is not greater within this government.

I turn now to the justification for the bill. The objective of the Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is to relocate the Labour Day public holiday from May to the first Monday in October. This is presently the date for the Queen's Birthday public holiday, which, as I have said, was established by the parliament less than a year ago. The changes that are to take effect in 2013 have not been supported by any rational argument. The explanations for the change provided by the Attorney-General are so shallow and weak that they embarrass this parliament.

I can recall my surprise when listening to the maiden speeches of so many new LNP members of this parliament. An extraordinary percentage of them stood in this chamber and declared their heartfelt and absolute loyalty to the Queen of Great Britain. I remember thinking to myself, 'Of all the issues that our communities are confronting, this issue is considered to be so significant by so many within the LNP as to be specifically highlighted in their maiden speeches.' Nobody in this chamber is in any doubt or in any way, shape or form unaware of the Attorney-General's enthusiasm for the Crown. This bill is two things: firstly, it provides the tory royalists the opportunity to restate their undying fidelity to the British monarch and, secondly—and more importantly—it provides those parties with the opportunity to assail and belittle the labour movement. As if this government has not done enough of that already in this term. Who is not

aware of this government's general hostility to the union movement as demonstrated in principle and practice?

The committee did not hold public meetings when considering this bill. That is certainly regrettable. The committee received 20 submissions on the bill and I will reflect on the content of some of those as I proceed. I will start from the beginning of the process. The former government undertook a very lengthy review of the spread and allocation of public holidays in Queensland. In September 2011 a discussion paper titled *Getting the balance right: a proposal on holidays in Queensland* was produced and released for comment. Surprising as it may seem to those opposite, that is part of consultation. There was very substantial consultation associated with the paper and the subsequent recommendations made to the government reflected that consultation. That widely consulted outcome was to move the Queen's Birthday holiday in Queensland to the second half of the year from 2012, ideally September or October. As I said, this was a widely consulted position that resulted in the bill that was put to the parliament last year. As part of the development of that bill, nearly 25,000 people responded to surveys and 85 per cent of those supported moving the Queen's Birthday holiday to the second half of the year. In 2011, that bill went through this House without debate and was reported as receiving bipartisan support. So what has changed? The one thing that has changed is that we have a bunch of parliamentarians who seem to spend their lives fawning over the monarch.

This bill is nothing short of an attack on the labour movement and the traditions associated with it. For many Queenslanders, Labour Day in May is as significant as Australia Day and Anzac Day. As has been pointed out, the Queen's Birthday celebration in June has nothing to do with the Queen's actual birthday. Many submissions made to the committee reflected on the history of Labour Day and the extreme importance of it being connected to May Day. Who in Queensland is unaware of the strong connection between the eight-hour day, the struggle for the minimum wage, the rights to bargain collectively and the celebration of Labour Day? Australia set the progressive agenda in the late 19th century, but in Queensland that date is particularly important, because one of the first Labour Day processions in the world occurred in Barcaldine on 1 May 1891 and the public holiday has been celebrated in Queensland on the first Monday in May since 1901.

This disrespectful government is prepared to go to any lengths to stick it to the labour movement. In the same fashion that this government has treated its own workers, it intends to treat all Queenslanders who respect the effort of their forebears. What is even more incredible to me is that this government is prepared to pull down the May Labour Day, this state's oldest surviving public holiday. Not even Joh and his cronies were stupid enough to stir the ants' nest in such a disrespectful, insensitive and arrogant fashion, which is what this bill reeks of.

There are other reasons this bill in its current form should not be supported. One of those is the incredibly short notice provided for the transition to the new dates. The committee made certain recommendations that, as I have said, have been rejected that would address some of those matters. However, to my mind these are quite secondary issues. It is enough to say that I found some of the submissions to the committee to be positively lightweight. It was difficult to find the thinnest thread of logic in some of the positions put and I reject them out of hand.

I cannot stress loudly enough my total opposition to the premise of this bill. I insist that all the evidence supports my assertion that this bill is nothing more than the result of a bunch of royalist Tories sticking it to the labour movement. Every government member with any decency and with any respect for their fellow Australians and Queenslanders should hang their head in shame. I will conclude with a simple statement of fact: working people in Queensland will not forget this period of insult piled on insult piled on insult. They will never forget this and neither will I. What goes around comes around. I oppose this bill absolutely, because it has no merit whatsoever. The consideration of this bill was a waste of the committee's time and it is a waste of this parliament's time. The bill is deliberately intended to insult working people. This bill is no more than another shameful example of the small-minded, childish motives of this government. For members of this government who often tout their decency and sense of honour, this bill represents another compromise of their values. If those members opposite do not realise that this bill is unprincipled, there is little hope of them ever reaching the commanding height of adult behaviour. I will not be supporting the bill.