




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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HOLIDAYS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumba—ALP) (3.18 pm): I stand to speak in support of this bill and I urge the opposition to support this bill and keep May Day where it is. In this speech, I am going to take an historical perspective. Firstly, I say that May Day and the achievement of an eight-hour day is a very important part of Queensland's history. The celebration of May Day in May is one of our longest standing commemorations of what we have achieved in Queensland. Secondly, May Day is part of the heritage that we all share. I am talking to the Liberals on the other side, so I hope they are listening carefully—ones who are left.

Colonial liberals—merchants, artisans, lawyers—and the working class worked together to push for political reforms in early colonial Queensland. Together they were the main opposition, what historian Ray Evans noted was called 'the Brisbane crowd'. Brisbane labourers, shop keepers and the like combined to build the political rights we enjoy in this parliament. They worked together to defeat the Militia Bill 1862. A three-year military conscription was proposed for adult male colonists with no exemptions. It was defeated through concerted public action by a coalition of radicals, workers and liberals, most of whom did not have the vote. Together these different classes of Queensland society attempted to make the upper house elective, led by liberal paper, the *Daily Guardian*, and future Liberal premiers Arthur Macalister and Charles Lilley. They worked together against the squattocracy in the case of the Pugh trial. In 1861 the editor of the *Moreton Bay Courier*, TP Pugh, was prosecuted for seditious libel of the Legislative Council. Once again the workers and the merchant class combined in actions such as street demonstrations to stop this sedition trial. In these three examples, the working class and the liberals were allied to fight for colonial democratic reforms.

I remind the small-l liberals still left on the other side of the House of another part of our common heritage. Part of Liberal and Labor ancestry are the Australian and Queensland Chartists. In England, Chartists were dangerous radicals who were jailed, but in Australia Chartists were a middle-class and working-class movement. They opposed the landowning squattocracy who restricted access to land. In Australia they pushed for the rights of small landholders to hold land granted by the government against the powers of the landed squatters. This grouping—liberals, Chartists and workers—came together to support the first important political and social reform we achieved in Queensland and that was the eight-hour day won by Queenslanders without this parliament—won before this parliament ever existed. It marked the birth of the labour movement and happened at the same time that the state of Queensland was born.

A Brisbane Labor League started as early as November 1856. The Labour Alliance Committee formed in September 1857 to push for an eight-hour day and the Stonemasons Union was formed in January 1858. By March of that year the stonemasons had won a 48-hour week: eight hours a day for six days a week. We achieved this before we even became Queensland and it is something that has endured these 150 years. From the mid 19th century this achievement was celebrated on May Day—on 1 May. To the small-l liberals: the eight-hour day was achieved by unions and workers, but it is a

victory that also belongs to that early colonial coalition of liberals and working-class Queenslanders. They worked together to push for democratic rights. Your political ancestors helped achieve the eight-hour day and other political reforms from early colonial Queensland. They were the shopkeepers, the artisans and the upwardly mobile working class, and they are both our political ancestors. The eight-hour day that we celebrate in May—where it should be—is your victory as well and we should all honour it.