Speech By

Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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HOLIDAYS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (4.19 pm): Here we are again at the end of a year and this minister is fixing up another mess while also doing the bidding of the union movement in Queensland. In the past two years we had the Easter trading holidays legislation. I am going to call this for what it is: it is blatant corruption between the Labor Party and the union movement in Queensland. This is just doing the bidding of the union movement.

I have to say: if the Crime and Corruption Commission cannot see an analogy between the Labor Party receiving donations from the union movement and then legislation being put before this parliament, there is something wrong. If it is okay for the CCC to say that developers should not be able to donate to political parties because of a perceived conflict of interest and influence, how can the CCC not say that the same potential conflict of interest does not arise with the union movement making donations to the Labor Party? That is an important point, because, as the minister indicated, the minister announced these changes on 4 August 2019 in a big splash in the *Courier-Mail* and then on 5 August, one day later, the shoppies union gave about $4,000 to the Labor Party. The day after it appeared in the paper, the shoppies union wrote the cheque and said, 'Thanks, Minister; here's $4,000 to the Labor Party.'

Let us look at the history of the shoppies union. When this minister introduced changes to Easter trading hours, the shoppies union also wrote a big cheque to the Labor Party. Therefore, I say to the Crime and Corruption Commission that there is a direct link between legislative reform by the Labor Party in this place and what the unions get for their money. They are donating money to the Labor Party and they are getting legislative changes. The reason that the shoppies union wants this legislative change is that they want to build their membership as they know that if they build their membership they control the workforce.

This legislation is about nothing more than doing the bidding of and thanking the union movement, and the union movement then saying, 'Thanks, here's $4,000.' Is it any coincidence that the day after the government announced these changes the shoppies union, which advocated for this change, cut a cheque to the Labor Party of about $4,000? If we look over the past five years, thousands and thousands of dollars have gone to the Labor Party from the shoppies union and legislation has been brought into this place.

I put it to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the reason we are debating this Christmas Eve part-day public holiday is that the Labor Party has had advocacy and donations from the shoppies union. As I said at the start, I will be blunt: the time for skirting around these issues with the union movement and the relationship they have with the Queensland Labor Party is gone. The Labor Party needs to be exposed for the dodgy relationship it has with the union movement and not just the shoppies union, as we are debating today, but also the CFMMEU, the ETU and other unions in Queensland.

Here we go again: this is about more favours for the unions from the industrial relations minister—favours that will sell out Queensland jobs and rip off Queensland consumers. We have heard it all before. The song is on repeat from Labor's broken record of economic mismanagement. When it comes to public holidays, this minister knows how to make a complete mess of things—and I am referring just to public holidays and not the 200 amendments she made to the racing bill.

Ms Grace: That wasn't my bill. You know that.

Mr BLEIJIE: The minister keeps saying that it was not her bill. It was poor Bill Byrne's bill, but when he absolutely mucked it up this minister had responsibility for that bill, which in turn became her bill to which she moved 200 amendments or more in the parliament.

We all remember the Easter Sunday debacle. Last year, the minister gazetted Easter Sunday as a public holiday, but she forgot to make sure that the trading hours legislation was also updated so that the shops could actually open. She said that Easter Sunday would be a public holiday and then I reminded the minister that there is a separate piece of legislation called the trading hours legislation. Of course, then they had to whip amendments into the parliament, because she had told businesses that it would be a public holiday but had she forgotten to tell businesses that they could open on that public holiday, so she then had to amend the trading hours legislation. As the media rightly described it at the time, it was the great hot cross bungle. Despite all the protests and excuses made by the minister, she had to run through the changes to fix it.

With this legislation and amendments, we have not only the hot cross bungle but also the Grinch who stole Christmas from the workers and the business groups. Do members know what the Labor Party and socialists do not understand when you put a tax on business, which is what this is? This is another tax. The minister has indicated that it will be at the lower end of the scale and not $115 million, which is at the higher end. She said it would likely be around $31.9 million. How can she be confident of that if the department is not confident about whether it will be $31 million or $115 million? I do not accept it when the minister comes in here and says, 'We cannot actually estimate it, but we assume it will be at the lower end.' We know that with anything the Labor Party touches you have to triple it. It will not be $115 million; it will be half a billion dollars by the time this minister is finished with it. It will be a half-a-billion-dollar tax on businesses in Queensland.

The other thing that this former union heavyweight and now minister does not understand is that when you tax business they are not going to open their business.

Ms Boyd: That is rubbish.

Mr BLEIJIE: Employees will lose out. I take the interjection. I assume it was the socialist for Pine Rivers, the member for Pine Rivers, who said, 'That is rubbish.' She said that it is absolute rubbish; employees will not lose out because businesses will not close. I ask the member for Pine Rivers: if you put a tax of $115 million on business in Queensland, who pays for it? Does the money just fall from the sky? Does the member for Pine Rivers seriously think that at the end of the rainbow there sits a little leprechaun with a pot of gold which businesses can just grab? I ask the member for Pine Rivers: where does the money come from? I understand that the member for Pine Rivers thinks that they just print money and that small business has money to burn. I can tell the member for Pine Rivers that they do not. I expect that in her life the member for Pine Rivers has never had to do a hard day's work for an income. That is why she does not understand and why Labor does not understand the impacts of taxing business.

Ms BOYD: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find the contribution from the member for Kawana personally offensive and ask him to withdraw.

Mr BLEIJIE: I withdraw. The member for Pine Rivers said that it is rubbish. I can tell the member for Pine Rivers this: if you put a tax on business of $115 million, someone has to pay it. Guess what? When it comes to small business, it is not the Labor Party or the taxpayer who pays for it; it is the individual mum-and-dad operators who pay for it. It is not the government and it is not the taxpayer; it is the individual members. This tax will mean that businesses will close. If the member for Pine Rivers wants some examples, she can read the committee report, because some of the submissions, including to the member for Pine Rivers—

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: I have not finished. The member for Pine Rivers should let me finish and then she can go for all she likes.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McArdle): Stop the clock. Members for Kawana and Pine Rivers, you will not have a battle between the two of you. You will talk through the chair at all times.

Mr BLEIJIE: A shop trader from Alexandra Headlands, in the electorate of the member for Maroochydore, said that he will not be able to afford to open his business. He said he will close his business on Christmas Eve. How can the Labor Party think that that would not impact employees, who will not make any money on Christmas Eve because the business will be shut?

Ms Boyd: Time with their families, time with their loved ones.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection from the member for Pine Rivers, who said that this is about having time with families. Not according to the minister. According to the minister, this is about making sure that they are financially compensated for working on Christmas Eve and that that is why you declare it a part-day public holiday.

Is the member for Pine Rivers saying that the whole deliberate strategy of this is to ensure that businesses do not open? If that is the strategy, that shows that the Labor Party have had it in for small business and business across Queensland right from the start. If that is what this is about, then small business should be shivering at what is to come next from the Labor Party. We know that the Labor Party is not the friend of small business or business in general in Queensland.

This legislation will have a negative impact on employees. Employees will not make any extra money on Christmas Eve. The employees I speak to like working on public holidays, Christmas Eve and other days because they make more money to pay for their Christmas presents and their bills over Christmas. I have spoken to many employees. I was at the Minyama McDonald's for McHappy Day the other day. Three great employees were working there that Saturday and the manager asked if one could take an extra shift that night, working overtime. All three of the employees jumped at the opportunity—young kids who are determined to work and determined to make money.

A government member: How much an hour?

Mr BLEIJIE: I take that interjection. They want more money and they want more pay, but guess what? If the business does not open, they will not earn a thing; they will receive zero dollars. This legislation will mean that businesses will not open. This is what the Labor Party does not get.

I understand where the Labor Party has difficulty with this. To see this, you only have to look at the Queensland Labor Party over the past five years, achieving the highest unemployment rate in the country. If anyone thinks that is not due to the policy failings of the Labor Party, they are kidding themselves. This will add to the unemployment troubles that we are already seeing in Australia, particularly in Queensland.

When Queenslanders woke up on 4 August to the front-page story from this minister, I am sure they all thought, 'Here we go again.' When these changes were first flagged we said that the LNP would not support anything that would cost local jobs or drive up prices for consumers. I will outline in more detail how this legislation will in fact do both.

Industry group after industry group lined up to pan these changes and criticise Labor's approach in their submissions and evidence to the parliamentary committee. I acknowledge the great work of the deputy chair of the committee, the member for Currumbin; the member for Pumicestone; and, for a short period of time, the member for Ninderry. The LNP members on the committee understand what is the beating heart of the Queensland economy. They understand what works and what does not. Their dissenting report clearly shows that what the Labor Party is trying to achieve will not work and will have a negative impact. I thank the LNP members on that committee.

As I said, industry group after industry group lined up to criticise the changes. Their submissions and evidence to the committee speak volumes about how the Labor government is anti business and anti jobs. Let us all remember that these changes are being rushed through the parliament at a time when Queensland has the highest unemployment rate in the nation, with more than 177,000 Queenslanders on the jobless queue. Make no mistake: these changes will cost jobs.

No-one disputes the fact that workers deserve to be paid for the work they do, but these changes will mean that businesses will not open or will reduce rosters, which means workers will lose out. The economic analysis shows that these changes will result in nothing short of a shambles. As I said earlier, some of the stakeholders have said that as well.

The Queensland Hotels Association appeared at the committee's public hearing. I note that we are hosting the Queensland Hotels Association's president's drinks here this evening. It will be interesting to hear what the Labor Party members say to the president after the QHA said about this bill—

The RIS states that there is no statistical information on the intention of employers to employ workers or open their businesses on a Christmas Eve public holiday. In the absence of that collected data, as the industry body representing over 88 per cent of the general licence holders in Queensland we polled our members. I can tell you that 100 per cent told us that their intention will be to reduce staff hours, close and negatively impact the workers of Queensland by reducing their shifts.

They have no option but to do that. The QHA also mentioned in its submission to the parliamentary committee—

The RIS uses 8 year old data from Adelaide for justification. This is not relevant or reliable and totally disregards the particular challenges of Central and Northern regional Queensland where communities are suffering from drought and financial hardship.

The RIS did say that the additional costs from the bill to the Queensland economy are estimated to be from about $41 million to $136 million. The preliminary estimate for the Queensland public sector per annum is estimated at $9.4 million to $21 million. It should also be remembered that there are other public holiday costs that businesses have to meet during this week—a point well made by industry. As I mentioned, these changes will cost Queensland jobs. Clubs Queensland told the committee—

The real effect, however, in these clubs and other forms of hospitality is that many clubs will simply choose to close their doors so that they do not incur a loss.

I repeat that for the member for Pine Rivers. Clubs Queensland said—

The real effect, however, in these clubs and other forms of hospitality is that many clubs will simply choose to close their doors so that they do not incur a loss—

even in the member for Pine Rivers' own electorate. It went on to say—

This negatively impacts staff by way of a reduction in overall shifts and it also affects the loyal clients. This also applies to tourists in some areas.

Of course, there has been silence from the tourism minister. It continued—

Businesses will also choose to roster skeleton staff.

These changes are also inconsistent and out of step with the majority of Australia. Since when did Queensland follow South Australia and Northern Territory on economic reforms? Give me a break! In the private sector, industries that would be impacted by the declaration of a Christmas Eve public holiday include private hospitals and aged-care and disability care facilities; accommodation services; continuous manufacturing processors; private transport, including freight and airport services; small and independent retail shops; takeaway and fast-food outlets; petrol stations; and licensed premises, restaurants and clubs. Large retail groups such as Woolworths, Coles, Aldi, Myer and David Jones are required to close in Queensland from 6 pm on Christmas Eve, in accordance with the trading hours laws that Labor already changed in 2017 following the Mickel review. These large retail shops may employ other staff such as night fillers after the 6 pm closing time. An analysis of business by the department provided that 15,338 Queensland businesses would likely be impacted by the changes, yet the minister says not to worry, that there will be not much impact.

I will list the businesses that will be impacted by the changes. They are business accommodation, 1,597; cafes and restaurants, over 6,000; takeaway food services, 3½ thousand; pubs, taverns and bars, 752; clubs and hospitality, 480; fuel retailing, 507; supermarket and grocery stores with fewer than 20 employees, 991; fresh meat, fish and poultry retailing, 657; liquor retailing, 60; and other specialised food retailing, 640. These are the businesses that will be impacted by these changes, yet Labor tries to talk down such impact. As the Australian Retailers Association said during the public hearings on the bill—

Just because one government legislates a bad policy does not mean everyone should clamour to make the same mistake. Seven years down the track, Queensland is the only state government that has attempted to emulate South Australia. Governments of both political persuasions in every other state have declined to do so.

I suspect there is a reason for that. It continued—

That speaks volumes and once again inevitably turns the spotlight onto the 2020 election.

It does, indeed.

In September, when the bill was introduced, the National Retail Association CEO, Dominique Lamb, said that the new public holiday would put more pressure on small and medium businesses at a time when there were already several public holidays. She said—

It's likely that consumers are going to see prices, particularly in service industries, increase via surcharges, and that's just not what families need at Christmas time.

What is not staggering is that this minister—a former union boss—panders to the union bosses and toes the line continually. What is staggering is that she would introduce legislation that would impact Queensland's night-time economy—a key part of her local electorate—putting local jobs at risk. As the committee also uncovered, these changes will increase prices for consumers. The QHA mentioned this in the public hearing on the bill when they said—

Public holiday surcharges are not acceptable to most consumers. They cannot cover the additional costs anyway in the surcharge. The bill creates that perfect storm to kill off small business: increase costs and reduce your customers.

An important stakeholder has told the Labor Party members on the committee that this bill could kill off small business, and the Labor Party proudly come in here and march to the union line, march to the union song: *Solidarity Forever*. That is all we see in the Labor Party: solidarity forever. That is all we see.

Mr Minnikin: They just don't get business.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection from the member for Chatsworth: the Labor Party do not get business. This minister does not get business. All they know is the union way. All they know and rely on is the unions to support them in their preselections. That is all this is about. It is another tick of a box, pleasing another union movement in Queensland—this one being the shoppies union—time and time again. That is what we expect from this minister. About once a year we get a declaration of a public holiday and then the union donate to the Labor Party. We expect this now on a yearly basis.

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr Janetzki interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): Order, shadow Attorney-General and minister!

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection from the honourable minister along the lines of we take the side of big business all the time, considering it is the Attorney-General who has been caught out accepting donations, a gift in kind, from the Star Entertainment Group, who I suspect is a large organisation in Queensland. I do not think it is a small business operation. The Attorney has been caught out herself taking large donations from 'big, bad companies' as the minister would describe them.

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: Oh, Minister. Look to your own side first before you cast a stone.

Mr Janetzki interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Shadow Attorney-General and member for McConnel, cease your interjections.

Mr BLEIJIE: These changes are pro union and anti worker. They were reviewed by the Mickel report and suggested by the unions in 2016. Guess what? They were not recommended by John Mickel. John Mickel did not recommend this change when he reviewed these laws only two years ago. When the Labor Party hire a consultant, being a former Labor member and former Labor Speaker of the House, to conduct a review of trading hours, would you not think, Madam Deputy Speaker, that John Mickel would look at this issue and, if he thought they should change it, he would announce it and recommend it? He did not. In fact, in the review he made reference to this point and made reference to South Australia and said that in South Australia the situation was because an agreement was reached between employer and employee groups and that it was quite a different situation. We even have the Labor Party conducting its own review of trading hours. This was not recommended by the Mickel review, yet here we are.

The only ones pushing these changes are the union bosses who call the shots in the labour movement, specifically the shoppies union. They could not get their mate over the line on the Senate ticket at the last federal election in Queensland. That is how well they are going in Queensland. Queensland will be a ghost town this Christmas Eve. That is a time when tourists are here and people are spending money enjoying the festive season. When these changes are rushed through this evening, the Premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, as well as the minister, will forever be known as the grinches who stole Christmas Eve.

What is next on the agenda for Labor—a part-day public holiday on New Year's Eve? That is what they have in South Australia. That would turn Queensland into an international laughing-stock as a key tourism destination. Talking about being a complete laughing-stock, we now have amendments thrown at us. This minister has a habit of amending her bills, but I do feel for her on this occasion, because these are the Attorney's amendments.

Ms Grace: I am very happy to sponsor them.

Mr BLEIJIE: I know the minister will be happy to support them because I know the grief she has received in her own electorate over the liquor licensing laws and the ID scanners. Every letter the member for McConnel received they CCed the opposition, so we know how many of her constituents complained about the ID-scanning regime and the complete bungle of the ID-scanning regime that was introduced by the Attorney-General. I might add that when she rushed them through we said at the time, 'This is a complete bungle. The government and the Attorney-General will regret doing what they have done.' Then we saw international princes kicked out of—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Kawana, please come back to the bill we are debating.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Deputy Speaker, these are amendments to the bill that are to be moved.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: The amendments, which have been thrown at us now that we are debating the bill, are not relevant to this holidays bill. Yes, we will be debating them in consideration in detail, but they are not relevant to the Christmas Eve public holiday. Again, they have to throw these amendments in just before Christmas because they bungled it. They bungle it time and time again. The last sitting week of parliament is usually dedicated to Labor members fixing all of their bungles, fixing their mess, sorting out all the crises before they go on their Christmas holidays. Nothing has changed. Nothing has changed in the 10 years of Labor governments that I have seen. They even they spent their last week in opposition trying to fix all of their bungles.

My great concern—I am going to be writing to the Crime and Corruption Commission again about this issue—is that there is a concerning direct correlation between legislation like this we are debating today and donations received by the Labor Party in Queensland from the union movement. It seems that when donations are made a bill is introduced into the parliament. I think that should be concerning to members of this House. I think it should be as concerning as the government thinking that developers are donating to political parties or politicians. I might add that there was no evidence of any malfeasance or conflict of interest with developers and politicians, and the CCC did not recommend that change.

Here we go: I will be writing to the Crime and Corruption Commission because I think now is the time for the Crime and Corruption Commission to conduct a full-scale investigation into the Queensland Labor Party and its relationship with the unions, particularly the shoppies union. I have said it before. I have said it with respect to the relationship between the CFMMEU and the Minister for Industrial Relations and her office, which currently is subject to a CCC investigation, I might add, with respect to Enco. That is ongoing. As we have the highest rate of unemployment in the country—

Ms Grace: Did you say I was subject to a CCC investigation?

Mr BLEIJIE: No. I said the minister's Office of Industrial Relations is subject to a CCC investigation.

Ms Grace: That is only because you wrote to them.

Mr BLEIJIE: That is true.

Ms Grace: Crazy person.

Mr BLEIJIE: Actually, it was not because I wrote to them, Minister. It was because the CCC said it was of such a serious nature that they would investigate it.

Ms Grace: Yes and referred it back to the department.

Mr BLEIJIE: I would be very careful, Minister, with your commentary—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Kawana, I just took counsel from the table. There is a bit of a stretch between what you are debating and the bill. I ask you to come back to the bill please.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Deputy Speaker, I was taking interjections from the minister.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I said, there is a clear correlation, a concerning correlation, between the shoppies union and this minister, the Labor Party and the Labor government. The CCC should investigate thoroughly.

Ms Grace: You have said that once. You have said that twice. This is now the third time.

Mr BLEIJIE: And I am going to keep saying it and I am going to write to the CCC about it.

Ms Grace: Write to them! You have said that. Do it. I dare you. Do it!

Mr BLEIJIE: I am going to write to them because I think it is concerning. I think Queenslanders should be as concerned as me and the Liberal National Party opposition in Queensland.

Ms Grace: Do it!

Mr BLEIJIE: I cannot understand, Madam Deputy Speaker, that when I am making allegations of corruption by the Labor Party this minister is laughing. This minister is not taking these issues seriously, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): Order! Member for Kawana, please resume your seat. As I indicated, you are making allegations of corruption. There is an appropriate path to report that. I ask you to come back to the bill. If you cannot, we will move to the member for Nudgee.

Mr BLEIJIE: This bill is bad for business in Queensland. This bill is bad for employees. This bill is bad for employer groups. This bill will cost Queenslanders jobs. This bill will mean that businesses close on Christmas Eve. This bill will ensure—

Ms Grace: You're a joke! No-one can take you seriously. You're a joke!

Mr BLEIJIE: The minister is continually interjecting—

Ms Grace: Because you deserve it! You were taking my interjections before.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister! Member for Kawana, you have 11 seconds.

Mr BLEIJIE: I am praying and hoping the minister will move an extension of time for me, because I have not got to half of the things I wanted to talk about. The reality is that Labor is bad for business and Queenslanders will change that in October 2020.

(Time expired)