




Speech By
Joseph Kelly

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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HOLIDAYS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (2.26 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be shocked and amazed—and I am sure the entire House will be—to find that I support this legislation. I am similarly shocked—and I should not be after nearly five years in this place—but I continue to be shocked at the vitriol towards the trade union movement by those opposite. It is an attitude that I find perplexing and hard to understand. After all, a union is just a collection of workers who are trying to improve their workplace and, by extension, society.

If we look at what these miscreants have achieved in Australia over the past 150 years, I could understand why people are shocked and amazed at the Australian trade union movement: fair wages and safety in the workplace. These are the crazy fools who came along and said we should not continue to use asbestos and, in fact, we should compensate those people who had been damaged by asbestos. These are the people who said we should provide universal health care to people in this country so that every single Australian, whether they are a union member or not, have the opportunity to have decent quality health care. They are the people who make sure that parents have the time to care for newborn children by having parental leave. They are the people who said we should have a universal retirement system in superannuation. How many trillions of dollars do we now have available for investment thanks to these crazy fools from the union movement?

We all want to talk about the cost of the union movement, but we should not forget the massive increases that have been achieved in productivity thanks to the willingness of the union movement to work sensibly with employers to improve productivity. I think one of the stand-out unions in that vein is the SDA. My brother has been a retail worker for over 30 years. I am proud to say that in this country he enjoys perhaps the best working conditions of retail workers. That is thanks in no small part, in fact entirely, to the very hard work of the SDA.

How have they achieved this? I thought those opposite would welcome and support people who engage in sensible industrial relations, building sensible relationships with employers, sorting out problems sensibly and pushing constantly to improve the working conditions of their members. If my brother were in any other country in the world, he would probably be amongst the working poor. Instead, he has had a dignified life being able to pay off a house, being able to lead a decent life. When the SDA comes along and says there is something that we need to consider, I certainly listen. I am glad that those on this side of the House do as well. I would like to thank the minister for taking the time to understand this issue.

I want to talk about what this issue means for workers in the workplace because, much like the member for Stretton, this is an issue I am familiar with through my previous line of work before I came into this place. I am one of those people who has had to work through every public holiday that we have in this place. I can tell you that as a worker it is incredibly depressing when people around you are talking about what they are going to be doing at Christmas and what is going to happen on Boxing Day. You know how excited they are to be going off to the Woodford Folk Festival and what is going to happen on New Year's Eve. You say to yourself, 'Great! I've got three lates, an early and a night duty.'

Won't that be an exciting way to spend Christmas!' It is a special pain, and I only felt it in the last 10 years or so. When you have to say goodbye to your kids on Christmas Day and go to work it is not a fun experience. I believe firmly in my soul that people who have to do that deserve a penalty rate for being asked to do so. It does not matter whether you are doing this, as I was, to provide an essential service or whether you are simply doing something that provides a better quality of life and luxury for the rest of the community—if you are working on those days you deserve that opportunity.

In my experience, there were many nurses—particularly from certain cultural groups—for whom Christmas Eve was a particularly important time, so when those people were rostered to work on Christmas Eve it was very difficult for them. As a nurse, once the roster is posted if you get shifts that do not fit your schedule you try to swap them. Many nurses would hope and pray they got Christmas Day off. When they suddenly found they had to work Christmas Day they would approach other nurses to ask, 'Would you mind swapping a shift?' If there was a penalty rate attached to that shift your chances of getting someone to swap with you were much increased, but your chances of getting someone to swap Christmas Eve with you were mostly nil. Many workers were deeply distressed that, at a time when they would normally be undertaking religious observances, celebrating with their family or doing things important to their culture, they were instead at work—and not only having to work, but receiving no penalty rates. This is a really important step forward and I am happy to support this bill.

I want to finish by saying that as a shiftworker of many, many years, whenever I hear people talking about penalty rates saying that, 'We've moved on as a society. Our society doesn't operate that way anymore,' I say to you that that is one of the most offensive and ridiculous things you can ever say to a shiftworker. Anybody who has had to say, 'Sorry, kids, I won't be home until four o'clock on Christmas afternoon,' or 'Yes, I'm coming home at seven o'clock in the morning, but I'm going to have to be in bed by eight o'clock in the morning because I need to go to work that night,' knows that we are a society that operates 9 to 5, Monday to Friday.

Banks do not open on weekends. Industrial relations commissions and courts do not open on weekends. Generally speaking, we do not hold weddings on Tuesdays. Sporting events for the kids are all held on weekends. While we have those things in place, while we are a Monday-Friday society—and I can say proudly that we are a Monday-Friday society because of the union movement—people who are forced to work on weekends should be recognised and given penalty rates. It is absolutely disgraceful that people have lost those, thanks to the federal government. This legislation is an important step forward for our government. It is an example of not only how we value penalty rates but also how we are prepared to look at sensible extensions. I commend the bill to the House.