



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ADJOURNMENT

Workplace Relations

SPEECH

Thursday, 4 February 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Robert, Stuart, MP

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Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (4.40 pm)—On 19 March 2008 the Deputy Prime Minister did an interview with Kieran Gilbert on *PM Agenda*. The Deputy Prime Minister was asked:

The opposition has asked you to guarantee that no worker will be worse off, that no worker would be worse off under your system. Are you able to give that guarantee or is that too difficult?

Her response was:

I am certainly able to guarantee that under the bill that passed the parliament today, Labor's new laws, workers will not be disadvantaged by Labor's new laws they will be substantially better off.

She continued:

... no working Australian will any longer have to fear walking into a workplace and be confronted by an Australian Workplace Agreement that rips away a basic safety net condition.

The interviewer then asked:

So no group of workers will be worse off?

The Deputy Prime Minister responded:

Our bill today is about making people better off, and it will, and I can give the guarantee that no worker, from the bill we have passed today into Australian law, will be worse off.

It is my melancholy duty to inform the Deputy Prime Minister that that statement is not quite true. I have been inundated with calls from a range of workers who are meter readers with the Spotless Group. Many are from my electorate. An email that was sent from Wayne Platter at Spotless to a range of Energex executives says:

Guys, we need to make sure all staff are aware that, due to the implementation of the modern award as of 1 January, the majority of employees have incurred a reduction in their take-home pay. Please reiterate these changes verbally to all employees. The loss of allowance payments in regard to laundry allowance, 27 cents a day, and an all purpose allowance, \$48.95, are the contributing factors.

It continues:

Please impress upon employees that Spotless did not implement this modern award. This is a government issue.

The issue at play is that these meter readers were previously on a meter reading employees award—state 2005 and they were level 3 senior meter readers. They earned \$694.20 a week and allowances of \$19.95. It is 35 grand a year, which is not a lot of money. They have now moved onto the electrical power industry award 2010, where they have been rated at level 1, admin grade 1, at \$563 a week. That new award loses all allowances. They are \$130 a week worse off in pay and \$20 worse off in allowances. These are people earning \$35,000 a year. I acknowledge that point A.3.5 in the award has a series whereby the reductions kick in. On 1 July 2010 that loss of \$130 can only be 80 per cent of the loss. Therefore, they will be \$26 worse off on 1 July, plus the 20 bucks of allowances. On 1 July, they will be \$46 worse off because of this new award that they have been put on after the Deputy Prime Minister said on national TV:

Our bill today is about making people better off, and it will, and I can give the guarantee that no worker, from the bill we have passed today into Australian law, will be worse off.

May I suggest to this House that the Deputy Prime Minister's guarantee is not worth the paper it is printed on, it is not worth the speech it was delivered from and it is not worth the television time that she presented it on, because all of the meter readers who work with Spotless and are employed with Energex have right now lost the \$20 allowance and, as of 1 July, they will be \$46 worse off and, as of 1 July 2011, they will be over \$70 worse off. It is an absolute and utter disgrace and I demand that the Deputy Prime Minister holds true to her guarantee and protects these underpaid workers who are being ripped off by a Labor government that simply does not hear and does not care.