

18 March 2008

Matter of Public Importance

Economy

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (4.59 p.m.)—The sheer hypocrisy of this particular matter is something that I find breathtaking. For those on the other side, it is a short walk from the government benches to the opposition benches, but what a profound change we have seen. Like being struck down by a blinding light on the old road to Damascus, those on the other side who were incapable of seeing the hurt and the pain that working families across this country were facing now bring forward a motion about attending to the needs of struggling families. Those who could not see it—nor could they act on or respond to the policy challenges that faced the former government—now come forward bleating in support of those that are feeling it tough in our local communities throughout this country.

The pain that people are feeling is not new to me; it is something that I had been campaigning about for a considerable amount of time. In campaigning through the last election I encountered scores of families and scores of individuals throughout the community that were feeling the pain of increased mortgage payments and the increased cost of living. Right throughout, the then government's position was that working families had never been better off. Never, ever forget it: working families had never been better off. But clearly upon the election of a Rudd Labor government things have turned around. That is not the case. Go and talk to families throughout this country and you will know that the pain they have been feeling has progressively been getting worse. It has been getting worse because of the high inflation legacy that the former government has left this country with.

Listening to those on the other side, you would think that there were no problems. The member for Wentworth says there is no inflation problem; it is merely a fairytale. The member for Higgins told us he had inflation right where he wanted it. It is a shame for working families throughout this country that that was not in the Reserve Bank's target band; it was above it. That is why he and his colleagues left the working families of this nation with the highest inflation rate in 16 years. That is the Liberal legacy that they now seek to expunge from the record. We will not allow it. We will not allow people throughout this country to forget about the disdain with which those on the other side have treated those feeling pain as a result of the rising cost of living that has progressively been getting worse, particularly over the last 11 years. Whenever there was a request for a policy response, a suggestion of how to respond to these challenges, those on the other side said, 'Working families have never been better off.' What you see in this government is a government that cares about the needs of working families—'struggling families', as those on the other side have put it in this motion. We care about the needs of those families, and that is why we have a platform and why we are implementing changes that will have a marked impact in lifting and improving the quality of life and the living standards of those families.

Clearly the biggest impact on the household budget at the moment is from housing costs, whether you have a mortgage or whether you are paying a rent. Those who have mortgages have seen 12 consecutive increases in interest rates. Surely those on the other side are not going to try and sheet home blame to those of us within the government for those 12 increases in interest rates. They were the ones that went to the 2004 election saying, 'We will keep interest rates at record lows.' They were the ones that claimed

responsibility for interest rates. Twelve interest rates rises in a row—that is how many increases we have seen. The pressure on working families in my electorate means that many families are now paying \$750 a month more in mortgage repayments, and that is on an average mortgage. It is probably on a more modest level than in other parts of Sydney, but that is \$750 a month that people have to find from somewhere else.

At the same time, there are those on the other side: the architects of Work Choices. Never has there been a policy more focused towards striking at the very heart of the living standards of working families. We hear the member for Cook talking about the need for wage restraint. It is really code for, 'We're still sticking with Work Choices.' Forget about the mantra of, 'We neither support it nor oppose it.' What does that mean? The member for Cook has just let the cat out of the bag. What it really means is: 'We got caught out. Sure, it wasn't a very popular policy, but that doesn't mean we can't adhere to it. It doesn't mean we can't stick with it. It doesn't mean we can't breathe a little bit of life back into it when the opportunity next arises.' That is the position of those on the other side when it comes to Work Choices. How they can come into this place and purport to stand up for working families when they were the architects of, and the ones that implemented, those policies is beyond me.

The high inflation legacy that we have been left with has meant that there has needed to be a very direct and a very immediate policy response. We do have a five-point plan. I hear a lot of talk from those on the other side about how ineffective that plan may prove to be, but I do not hear a lot about what their alternatives might be. They accuse those of us on this side of talking up inflation. I accuse those of you on that side of driving it up. You and your policies have driven up inflation. There is no greater attack upon the living standards of working people than to erode the value of the dollar in their pocket, and that is what inflation does. We have a five-point plan. It is about modernising our economy. To modernise the economy you have to show restraint when it comes to spending.

We have seen a cavalcade of excesses demonstrated time after time in this parliament when we have gone through the spending priorities of the former government. We have seen cheese factories that did not produce cheese. We have seen \$10 million rain makers, even though the authorities only suggested and recommended that \$2 million would have been a stretch when it came to a funding proposal of that scope. We saw \$121 million in expenditure on propaganda for Work Choices. We saw over an 11-year period \$2 billion worth of government advertising.

There is not a lot of discussion from those on the other side about spending restraint, because they did not show any. When they were in government they could not help themselves. And the problem was that they got away with it for so long that they lost sight of what they were doing. They spent their way out of trouble in the 2001 election, so they came back for more in 2004. They just kept doing it. And the worse the position for them became in the polls, the more they spent. In doing so, they have left this country with a high inflation legacy. That is the Liberal legacy and it is the legacy that we now attack not just by showing expenditure restraint but also by investing in workforce participation, investing in skills and infrastructure and by boosting national savings.

We talk about boosting national savings. I can only assume from the comments by the member for Cook that he would acknowledge that the introduction of superannuation was the biggest savings measure this country has ever seen. These are the sorts of things that need to occur to modernise the Australian economy to ensure that we are able to keep inflation within manageable limits, that does not strip away



at the value of the dollars in the pockets of working people. Labor have brought forward many proposals, many of which we have begun to implement, such as the appointment of a petrol commissioner. This is a very serious initiative that will lead to much more transparency in the setting of petrol prices. Our inquiry, through the ACCC, into grocery prices; our tax cuts; the tax cuts which will deliver improvements in workforce participation; our childcare tax rebate; and our education tax refund are all policies designed to help those struggling families which the opposition has only just discovered.

So I say to the opposition: get out of this place, go around this country and talk to those families. That is something you did not do much of when you were in government. I suggest you go and do it before you stand up purporting to represent them. They had had enough of you. That is why they turfed you out. It is why they are supporting our platform, which is a platform directed towards implementing initiatives which take pressure off families and which gives them some support, as they do the hard work of trying to raise families and build a better future for their children and their grandchildren.