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(Uniting Church in Australia - Victoria and Tasmania)

Trades Hall Speech: 7 June 2006

Church, Community and Unions

Good evening.

I don't know about you but I don't really want to be here tonight. It's been a long day; in fact it's been a long week and I'm feeling pretty buggered. But I am sure this is true for many of us who have gathered here tonight.

My wife has been pretty sick to, so when I get home she's in bed already so that she can feel better for work in the morning. We haven't seen much of each other this week. Welcome to my world. Welcome to your world. Welcome to the new world of work where family life is sacrificed to the gods of productivity and national interest.

There are other things that I would rather be doing. I declined going out for a drink with my son tonight. He recently announced that he was going to live and work overseas and thought it would be nice to have a quiet beer before he flies out.

But you and I know that apathy changes nothing and apathy will not stop the eroding effects of this new legislation. That's why we are here.

Personally, I can't think of any other way of pursuing social justice.

Justice in society is about people. It comes through people working together. It comes through groups of people rising above their personal views and philosophies and reaching for something far more important - far

more significant - the building of a community that looks out for the least powerful and the most vulnerable, and names exploitation when it sees it.

The FairWear campaign is just one illustration of church, community and union working together; and working together for 10 years. Other campaigns like Justice for Asylum Seekers, and the Gambling Task Force reflect this same cooperative approach to seeking justice. But the fairWear Campaign, protection for Outworkers in the Textile, Clothing and Footwear sector is perhaps the best example.

Change for good seldom comes easily or swiftly. But, despite the obnoxious character and intent of this new legislation, Outworkers are the only section of the workforce to have received special mention and protection.

10 years of deliberate campaigning and shaming has paid off. Legislation is slowly coming into place. Politicians have heard and been moved by the truth, and some of the most vulnerable and powerless in the workforce have now been protected.

Exploitation is as old as the relationship between power and labour. The ancient story of Moses and the Hebrew people escaping from Egypt, is as much about freedom of association and the right to strike and withdraw labour, as it is about responding to God

This is what the First Testament says "And Pharoah gave this command to the over-seers. Until now you have provided these people with straw for brick-making. Do so no longer. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And what is more, you are to get from them the same number of bricks as before - there will be no reduction in quantity".

This new legislation has been crafted by the heartless Pharaoh's of our time.

They really don't care. It's about money. It's about power. It's about control.

But you and I know that what really matters in life - is people. Their lives. Their families. Their hopes. Their safety. Their homes.

Ordinary folks who really don't want for much. A bit of respect and a bit less struggle. People like you and me. This legislation must be resisted and opposed. Because this thing is bigger than church. Bigger than Union. Bigger than Politics. Its about the kind of society that we want to create for ourselves, for our neighbours and for our children.

And we can only resist this legislation TOGETHER.

Thankyou