SVITZER AND AMAZON

Statement

HON MARTIN PRITCHARD (North Metropolitan) [9.46 pm]: I will not make it a long one. It has been a long day. Last week there was some discussion in this chamber about the actions of an overseas-based company Svitzer and its proposal to take industrial action against its Australian workforce. Although extreme, the proposed lockout was legal. What I ask myself though is: was it moral? There is no doubt that the company wanted to introduce changes in its enterprise agreement that the workforce did not accept, and that was frustrating. I can understand the frustration. In my opinion, it is usually the case that the company does not want to pay appropriately for the increases in productivity that the changes are designed to create, but I confess to not knowing all the details. At this time, I am more concerned with the question of power and the moral use of that power.

In this particular case, I only raise a criticism about why I think Svitzer has not acted like a good corporate citizen. Firstly, it should sit down with the union and negotiate a reasonable wage increase and decent conditions. I am sure that if it kept negotiating in good faith, it would eventually get to that point. I ask the company to remember that it is not only about the shareholders and profits, even though the shareholders probably govern how big the CEO's pay packet is.

Australians expect Svitzer to also look after the local people who work for it and to not just use Australia as a cash cow. As a good corporate citizen, Svitzer should also consider how its actions impact Australian businesses and the people who live here. As a personal example, in the past I have been involved with strike action at some of our pharmaceutical warehouses and we always came to some arrangement about emergency medication. I ask Ms Kirdar True to remember that this is not just about hurting Australians until she gets her way, but good corporate citizenship.

These types of debates always remind me why I committed to the union movement and the Labor Party for most of my working life. I do not understand how people can cling to the idea of trickle-down economics when it seems that no matter how much profit a company makes it is never enough. As I mentioned earlier, the fact that CEO wages are often voted upon by shareholders and not employees might have been the death of that particular theory. I also do not understand how anyone can believe that the bargaining power between an employer and its staff, without their union, can be seen as equitable. The comprehensive defeat of workplace agreements in this state, and of WorkChoices, demonstrates what a fair thinking society thinks of this particular concept.

I want to congratulate the federal government and I wish it well on passing industrial relations legislation that I hope will help remedy some of the travesties of the past. This week, I have learnt that my own union, the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association, and also the Transport Workers Union, are struggling to get another large foreign-owned company to treat its Australian workforce with respect. I am talking about Amazon. Members will know this company. They have probably used it on many occasions. It has been very successful, probably more so during COVID-19, considering its online format. In fact, it has been so successful that it made over $120 billion in the last quarter of 2022. One can only wonder what wage increase and bonus the CEO received. However, when it comes to its Australian workforce, those who work hard to make that profit for it, the company is being most frugal. Typical of many large American-based companies, Amazon fights hard to limit union activity on its sites. I say to Amazon that if it is willing to take profits from Australians, it should also be prepared to sit down with the SDA and the TWU to negotiate a good wage rise, decent working conditions and a safe environment for its Australian workforce.