



Speech by

**Dr DAVID WATSON**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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Hansard 21 October 1998

### UNEMPLOYMENT

**Dr WATSON** (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.03 p.m.): I move—

"That this House notes the deteriorating job situation in Queensland and the failure of this Government to make any progress towards their stated 5% unemployment target."

This morning in this House we were ridiculed for criticising Labor's Jobs Plan before we had seen it. Now that we have seen it, it is quite obvious who should be ridiculed: Labor. Its so-called Jobs Plan, although noble in intent, is totally lacking in content. It provides false hope, because it is focused almost solely on training. We know what creates jobs. We do not have to have seminars or send out surveys. We know what creates jobs. Members on this side of the House who have been in business, such as my colleague beside me, know what creates jobs. What creates jobs is increased business confidence. I do not see anything in Labor's so-called Jobs Plan—a special campaign to create more jobs—that increases business confidence. I do not see any real incentives for employers to create real jobs.

It is ironic that Labor is using Wally Lewis to launch a program that is so training oriented. "The King", the greatest player Queensland Rugby League has ever produced, was never known as a great trainer. However, he was magnificent in the real games. The real game here should be to create real jobs. All that a three-week advertising campaign will do is create a few advertising jobs in Brisbane. Let us be brutally frank here: no cash-strapped employer is going to give someone a job because he or she sees Noel Preston on TV.

**Mrs Edmond** interjected.

**Dr WATSON:** I should say Noel Pearson; Noel Preston would be even worse.

An employer will give someone a job if he or she has confidence that their business is going to grow. How can one have confidence that one's business is going to grow when Labor is trying to wind back our industrial relations laws? How can one have confidence that one's business is going to grow with Labor's native title solution holding one back?

I note with interest that in the press release today for Labor's Jobs Plan there is no mention of the 5% unemployment target. Has it been forgotten already? Has it been chucked in the too-hard basket already? Let us suppose for the purpose of this debate that the 5% target still exists. Unemployment in this State currently stands at 9.2%. We are not even one ninth of the way into Labor's first term, and "jobs, jobs, jobs" has become "excuses, excuses, excuses". The unemployed people of Queensland do not want excuses; they want a real plan. Where are the real job targets?

On 19 May, Mr Beattie said on ABC radio that the target of 5% unemployment will be etched in every Minister's mind and that he would be reviewing it and driving it. Ministers would go to bed at night thinking about it. If Mr Beattie is driving it, where is the road map? Where are the milestones? Is it a three-year target or a five-year target? In the Queensland Times of 30 May this year, the honourable member for Ipswich, the Treasurer, is quoted as saying—

"Originally we thought the target was realistic in the next term. What Peter Beattie has said is that it should be a goal for three to five years."

Which is it—three years or five years? I think the people of Queensland need something a little less vague. When does Labor's plan officially kick in? Do we have to wait until five minutes to midnight—four years, 11 months and 29 days from when Labor was sworn in—for its real jobs plan to activate? I call on the Premier to either produce a real timetable or apologise to the people of Queensland for making

false promises. Since making that 5% target the cornerstone of Labor's campaign, all that has followed from Mr Beattie are excuses as to why it will be very difficult to achieve. It did not take long for the first excuse to come tumbling out. The polls had not even closed on election day and already Mr Beattie was in excuse mode. His first excuse was the Asian financial crisis.

**Mr Santoro:** It dawned on him.

**Dr WATSON:** He got a message.

In an article in the Courier-Mail on Saturday, 15 August, John Lehmann wrote—

"After running hard during the election on his ambitious goal of cutting unemployment to 5 percent in three to five years, Mr Beattie said his 'heart sank' when visiting polling booths on the Saturday morning of the election."

In the article Mr Beattie is quoted as saying—

" 'I got a pager message that Japan was in recession while I was at the Wilston State School. I thought, that's a smack in the head we don't need. It will make it much harder to achieve the jobs target—I'd be dishonest if I didn't say that.' "

What hypocrisy from Mr Beattie! He knew the projected growth rates and he knew the effect of the Asian crisis well before the election. In fact, in this place 25 days before the election, Mr Beattie in his speech in response to the coalition Budget said—

"Economic growth is forecast to drop from 4.4% this year to 3.75% next year, and 3.5% the year after... Access Economics, however, predict that Asia will have a greater effect two years out, with Queensland likely to grow at only 2.6%."

The Premier knew the figures; he knew the facts. However, he still persisted with his hollow promise to vulnerable Queenslanders, and that is inexcusable!

The Premier's second excuse for backing away from the 5% unemployment target was the GST. Although the rest of the nation could see the obvious job-creating benefits of putting an extra \$50 a week in the pockets of the majority of taxpayers, Mr Beattie could not. The Premier claimed that a GST would attack the job security of the 125,000 Queenslanders who rely on the tourism sector for their employment. The Premier dismissed an independent assessment by Morgans Stockbroking of the effect of the GST on tourism. That assessment said that the GST will result in business costs to tourism falling by 2.8%. In turn, that should generate an extra 9,600 tourism jobs across Australia, 2,100 of which will be in Queensland. Clearly, the GST excuse is no excuse.

The Premier's third excuse was the Chevron gas pipeline. I refer to an article on the Courier-Mail of 3 October, in which the Premier stated—

"If we cannot deliver Chevron, our 5% unemployment target becomes more difficult."

What will be the Premier's next excuse?

**Mr Beattie:** The Opposition.

**Dr WATSON:** The Opposition! Will the next excuse be power cuts? Will the next excuse be that the unions would not let him cut youth wages? Will the next excuse be that Queensland did not win the Sheffield Shield?

**Mr Beattie:** That's a thought.

**Dr WATSON:** Those are the kinds of excuses that the Premier is starting to make. I am glad that the Premier decided to join us for this debate. I say to him that job seekers do not want his excuses; they want his real plan. Earlier, I called on the Premier—and I again call on him now—to put up or shut up. He should do one of two things: he should either admit that he misled the people of Queensland when he said that he could reduce the unemployment rate to 5%—he should admit that he sold them a pup; he should admit that he was elected under false pretences—or he should stop making excuses and start setting real targets and real benchmarks. That is what he should be doing. The Premier should be showing us in this Parliament and the people of Queensland his real numbers. He ought to be showing us his real interim targets.

**Mr Briskey:** You had no target.

**Dr WATSON:** The Government set the target at 5%. When the former coalition Government brought down its Budget, it indicated what it thought the unemployment rate would be. The Labor Party ridiculed that and set a 5% unemployment target. The Premier should show us his interim target. He should show us how he is going to achieve an unemployment rate of 5%. He should show us the jobs, jobs, jobs; not simply give excuses, excuses, excuses.

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