



Speech by

Mr DOUG SLACK

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard 17 November 1998

TRAINING FOR MATURE-AGE WORKERS

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): The House tonight has an opportunity to force this minority Government to face the challenges of the future in public sector training. It should take that opportunity. It should insist that the Government marches resolutely towards the future rather than continuing its headlong retreat to the policy failures of Labor's past. We live in a dynamic State. Queenslanders are energetic and innovative people. For the benefit of the member for Springwood particularly, let it also be noted that they are people of every age group.

Tonight I will examine the question of what exactly are the political and philosophical factors motivating a full-frontal attack by the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations on the previous Government during the Estimates committee hearings last month. Particularly, I believe he should be condemned over his attack on the previous Government's policy of encouraging mature workers already in employment to take advantage of the new training opportunities opened up for the first time through traineeships.

The primary political reality is that, prior to the State election, the Labor Party made a nakedly opportunistic appeal to the prevailing sympathy of Queenslanders and, indeed, of all Australians for the plight of the unemployed. But Labor got it wrong as usual when it came to actually proposing a solution. It focused exclusively on the situation—and let us all here note that it is a tragic situation—of young school leavers and the young unemployed. In the process, Labor cruelly raised the expectations of that section of the unemployed work force, and of their parents, families and peers. The Premier who leads this minority Labor Government stands condemned for having made this his personal crusade—one that is about as likely as any of the original crusades to achieve a positive outcome. Labor has made promises it cannot keep, raised expectations that cannot be realised and dreamed up targets it will never hit. Where was the analysis? Where was the assessment? Nowhere! It was simply a case of selecting a figure that the electorate might buy. Where was the analysis of the labour market? Where was the assessment of its long-term trends or of likely future developments? There were none. If there were, none of them were what Labor would want to put into the public arena. It was all too difficult and the analysis much too likely to come up with answers that members opposite would not want to live with. When the people they were cruelly trying to hoax found out what they were doing, they came the bounce instead. Now they have to live with the dilemma they have created for themselves. But this Parliament—on the numbers that the non-Labor majority have voted for—can bring them to heel.

It is a matter of no satisfaction to the many Queenslanders whose lives are blighted by unemployment that Labor, in its traditional fashion, is not seeking a future-oriented, creative solution. Instead, it is trolling through its extensive grab bag of past failures and desperately trying to modify any that it thinks might be made to look as though they may work this time around. The first of these recycled failures is the return of community-based, short-term employment initiatives. We have seen it all before: "There's a rock. Paint it." We all know that demand in the work force is for skilled workers in most trades and in the growing information technology sector, the service sector, and in the fields of administration and business management. Even Labor knows that. However, Labor is not directed towards workable outcomes, or even sensible ones. Instead of continuing to build new skills and a broader skills base, Labor plans yet again to spend millions upon millions of dollars on make-work and training-alternative schemes that will put the young unemployed to work, temporarily, in areas unrelated to the future of Queensland and of these young people themselves. They will be developing skills that

will bear little or no relationship—or, at best, a minimal relationship—to the skills they need to develop if they are to obtain a permanent job in the developing sectors of Queensland's economy.

It is no secret that the effect of Labor's proposed apprenticeship program will be to engage unemployed young people for up to three years in employment and training, at the end of which no jobs are guaranteed. Worse, taking them out of the job market for three years may well mean that they are simply three years older and even further behind the eight ball when they eventually find themselves dumped out into the real world. That is likely to be even more detrimental to those people who live in regional and provincial areas where genuine jobs—jobs requiring effective trade and other skills—are most needed. Labor's short-sighted policy shifts the focus and funding of critical areas of Government spending from job creation programs that support employers to unemployment reduction by the sleight of hand methodology of short-term employment training programs.

Time expired.
