



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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Hansard 20 October 1998

**BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY (PORTABLE LONG SERVICE LEAVE) AMENDMENT  
BILL**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (5.04 p.m.): I, too, would like an opportunity to make some comments about statements made by the Minister in his second-reading speech in relation to the performance of the coalition Government in the policy area of vocational education and training. He implied or made comments that indicated that he had drawn the inference that skills shortages within the building and construction industry are a result of inactivity on the part of the coalition Government during its 28 months in office. It is becoming an old story. Any impartial observer need look no further than the Minister's own speech to appreciate that the coalition Government in February 1996 inherited the problem created through years of Labor mismanagement.

Statistics quoted by the Minister show clearly that between 1993 and 1996, during the term of the late and largely unlamented Goss Labor Government, spending on training for the building and construction industry fell from 1.63% to 1.38% of the gross national payroll. Queensland accounted for an incredible 56% of the national decline. That happened under a Labor Government.

The Minister's inventiveness in seeking to deflect responsibility might work wonders in the Labor caucus room, but it will not do in the real world. When the Minister comes up with a disastrous outcome, he has no alternative but to cop the blame that is due. As usual, there is a big difference between the rhetoric and the facts, and does the Minister not hate it when his good story is spoilt by the facts! The indisputable fact is that it was the Labor Party in Government that permitted the problem to arise; the problem the incoming coalition Government had to fix. This House will be interested to hear the following additional information on the Labor Government's performance when last in office in relation to the building and construction industry. It is a shameful record. It is a catalogue of failure. It is something over which those opposite should hang their heads in shame. It is something that everyone with children of an age to be entering the work force should be aware of and be concerned about.

The number of construction industry apprentices in training during the period 1990 to 1997 fluctuated somewhat, but the variations during that period were from a low of 4,401 apprentices in 1990-91 to a high of 6,285 in 1994, dropping again to 5,747 in 1995-96. In the last four years of Labor's previous administration, that is, 1992-93 through to 1995-96, apprentice and trainee withdrawals—that is, apprentices who started their apprenticeship but did not finish—from this industry grew as follows. In 1992-93, the figure was 580. The next year, 1993-94, it was 748. It leapt in 1994-95 to 1,056. In 1995-96 it almost again reached 1,000 with a figure of 907. What a sorry record; what an abject failure; what a great reason for no-one to take on trust anything this Minister or this Government says about commitment to the future and about a vision for the future.

In the two years of 1994-95 and 1995-96, an average of 1,000 apprentices withdrew from that industry. Within the first full year of the coalition Government, the rate of cancellations was down to just over 700. In other words, it was down to pre-1993-94 levels. Similarly, the number of apprentices and trainees in the industry who completed their training fluctuated considerably. In 1992-93, there were 1,246 successful apprenticeship completions. Two years later under Labor, that figure had dropped to 874—a reduction of 362 apprentices and trainees completing their training. Those figures clearly demonstrate the true picture of Labor's capacity to assist Queensland's nation-beating building and construction industries. The figures clearly demonstrate Labor's failure to assist in the development of

Queensland when they were in office for six years and had ample opportunities to do so. The figures tell the story. Their record is clear. When Labor was last in Government, it failed miserably to address the training needs of the building and construction industry. Now it has a second chance to do so and, apparently, it is intent on doing so by scampering back to the past in industrial relations law.

We on this side have no cause to feel confidence in the Government's ability to deliver outcomes that the private sector deserves. This legislation is certainly not the best way of going about solving the problem of training in the building industry. For the benefit of this House, and particularly for the benefit of members who are new to this place and who, owing to their very narrow background, may have had only the dubious benefit of a skewed Labor Party briefing on these issues, I would like to outline the level of completions achieved within the building and construction industry during the coalition's first full financial year in office.

**Mr Bredhauer** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** The member would not know the meaning of the word. These figures for the 1996-97 financial year are the latest statistical figures. The member should listen to this because he would learn something. Once again, the facts give the lie to the Government's rhetoric. Once again, the facts get in the way of a good story. Those opposite would prefer not to know, but the facts are that in 1996-97 there were 1,335 successful completions—1,335 successful apprenticeships. That was an extra 461 successful apprenticeships completed—461 young people successfully completed their indentures, 461 more than did so in 1994-95, which was the Goss Labor Government's last full financial year in office, and almost 100 up on the best that Labor ever achieved in 1992-93. So much for Labor's record of enhanced employment opportunities! It prompts the cautious observer of today's Labor rhetoric to seriously question whether this party, now back in power and back in full propaganda mode, can actually deliver anything other than hot air. Can Labor deliver anything that is supported by fact?

On 13 October 1997, in a speech to the Construction 2001 conference, the then Leader of the Opposition, now Premier, informed delegates that of the 1,607 apprentices who started their training in 1992, only 883, or 55%, completed their indentures. That is indeed a disgraceful fact, and a disgraceful fact of which the present Government must be reminded often. It is a disgraceful fact that this minority Labor administration, as the heir to the Goss Government which so failed Queensland, must accept a great deal of responsibility. It is a fact that every one of us who are parents of apprenticeship-age kids should be concerned about—a 50% completion rate.

From the figures that I have provided, it is easy to see a reversal of the negative trend due to the diligent and effective policies and administration of the previous coalition Government and the high levels of confidence that that engendered in this and all other industries. Under the former coalition Government, in the 12 months to November 1997, new apprenticeship approvals for the industry increased by 10.6%. In fact, a comparison of the 1997 figures with those of 1990 indicate a 13% growth in apprenticeships for the industry. The former coalition Government introduced a wide and far-reaching range of initiatives aimed at increasing the building and construction industry's involvement in structured training. Under the coalition, part-time arrangements were built into the system of apprenticeships and traineeships so that the number of businesses that could for the first time consider employing an apprentice or trainee in their own right was widened significantly. The coalition introduced school-based apprenticeships and traineeships that allow young Queenslanders to gain relevant and useful industry experience as well as vocational qualifications while they are still attending school. The coalition introduced work-based delivery, significantly reducing and, in many cases, eliminating the need for apprentices and trainees to leave their own workplace to receive formal instruction. The coalition upgraded efforts to ensure the application of competency-based training across the full vocational education and training spectrum. All of those policies were designed to achieve positive results and they were in the process of doing so. The figures bear that out. They were doing so in accordance with a plan, and it was working.

Labor's disgraceful decision to raid the long service fund via a training levy—by using the workers' holiday pay bank—puts not only the fund at risk ultimately but also it adds unnecessarily to the bureaucratic overburden that successive Labor Governments traditionally impose on private companies, whose job is to make profits and thus build employment. If this Government is serious about increasing employment in this industry or in any other industry, it must first accept that companies and all employers have to make profits. It is simple: no profits, no jobs.

The building industry is cyclical. With the best will in the world, it is not possible to control fully the commercial cycle in a private enterprise economy. Even in a mixed economy such as Queensland's where there is a public works component that comprises a greater proportion of work on hand or planned than exists in other larger economies without our developmental needs, there is a very strict limit on what it is possible to do to influence this cycle. It is important that we build up the skills base in Queensland. It is crucial that this build-up encompasses work skills in traditional manual trades and in areas that will remain at least relatively labour intensive. No-one on this side will argue with that proposition. However, we have yet to hear a convincing argument from the promoters of this legislation

that the way chosen by this minority Labor Government, this transfer of holiday pay banked funds to an interventionist, Fabian-style mechanism for social engineering, is in any way the right way to go.

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