



Speech by

**VAUGHAN JOHNSON**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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

**Mr JOHNSON** (Gregory—NPA) (5.23 p.m.): The Building and Construction Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Amendment Bill 1998 deserves the closest scrutiny because essentially it proposes to introduce a new tax—one of the new taxes that Labor, in its dishonest campaign during the June State election, swore it would not be introducing.

It has been very good to hear Government members speaking on this Bill. When talking about creating employment and new jobs, first and foremost it must be recognised that many of the people on the other side of the House have probably never employed anyone. The issue of employing people comes back to the factor of paying. Considering the depressed economy that this country is currently experiencing, we should be very understanding of what employers are going through. We should not merely be looking at what will benefit the unions.

Everybody in this House is well aware of the fact that we want to create new apprenticeships and we need to upgrade professional people in those fields. A while ago I heard the member for Nudgee refer to industry attracting the best school graduates. That disappoints me somewhat because while industry is attracting the best school graduates, what happens to the young people who may not be in a position to take advantage of that situation? I hope that the schemes that the Government is proposing will not just pick the eyes out of the flock in the hope that the rest will do the best for themselves that they can. The coalition is about giving a fair go to all.

So much for Labor promises. The proposed amendments to the Building and Construction Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Act 1991 will break the spirit of the Premier's promise to the people of Queensland, if not the fact of his solemn undertaking. We are told by the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations that the proposed amendments will create a Building and Construction Industry Training Fund and that this fund will contribute substantially to the provision of training for workers in the industry. In his second-reading speech, the Minister told us that the establishment of the industry training fund was part of Labor's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle election platform.

The policy and the legislation now before the House is a typical Labor answer to a complex economic problem. It conforms to Labor's one-eyed view of policy, that if there is a problem one does not pick on the employers.

**Ms Bligh:** What jobs plan did you follow?

**Mr JOHNSON:** The Honourable Minister for Families is having a little laugh to herself. For her information, as I said a moment ago, in this situation we have to think of the employers. Not for one half of one moment do I ignore the fact that we are talking about the public sector. However, there are two sectors involved: the public and the private sectors.

**Mr Braddy:** The MBA wants this. The master builders want this scheme.

**Mr JOHNSON:** The member should let me go on. You are laying back there like a log.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! I remind the member to speak through the Chair.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker. My point is that this is not about sucking the last drop of blood out of the employers, most of whom are currently on the bones of their backsides because of the downturn in the industry and the economy.

**Mr Braddy:** The builders want this scheme.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I have listened to the Minister and I know what he is saying, but he is not listening to me. I am talking about the current downturn in the economic situation, which is something that we have to take into account here.

There is nothing new about the fact that Labor cannot produce anything new. When I first read the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle document, I was struck by two factors. Firstly, I was struck by the superficial nature of the Minister's considerations in addressing this most worrying area of his portfolio. Secondly, I had an incredible feeling of having seen this before and of history repeating itself. I refer to the many similarities between the Government's present initiatives and those of its first Jobs Plan, which was introduced in 1992 when Mr Goss was Premier. I quote from the Beattie Government's current Jobs Plan, and this is highly significant——

"Between 1993 and 1996, spending on training in the industry fell from 1.63% to 1.38% of gross payroll nationally. This amounted to \$14m, or a fall of approximately 30% investment in training by employers. In Queensland we accounted for \$8m, or 56% of the national decline."

I say again: Queensland accounted for \$8m, or 56% of the national decline.

**Mr Santoro:** During the Labor Party's time.

**Mr JOHNSON:** That is absolutely right, as the member for Clayfield and the former very good and hardworking Minister for Training and Industrial Relations pointed out. We are now seeing the unions trying to dismantle the good things that he attempted to put in place. That quote was from the Minister's second-reading speech to the House in August this year. That was just one of the legacies of the Goss Government's first Jobs Plan. By comparison, the coalition's recently completed term in office is celebrated by record numbers of apprentices and trainee commencements.

We just heard my colleague the member for Callide elaborate on that achievement—1,335 apprentices in one year, or 461 more than Labor's best achievement in its time in office. Surely to God those figures speak for themselves. It is about time that members on the other side of the House started to give a bit of credit where it is due. They are knocking for the sake of knocking.

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr JOHNSON:** What was that again?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I remind honourable members to interject from their correct seats.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Thank you for your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker; I certainly need protecting at times. The member for Townsville lives in the heart of one of the great industrial cities in this country, and it will continue to be so if he does not wreck it. It was your Goss Labor Government and you were a member of the Townsville community——

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr JOHNSON:** Mr Speaker, I will defer to you, but I have to give my mate a serve first. It was them who tried to close the Townsville railway workshops. The railway workshops boasted somewhere between 6% and 10%——

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I refer to a previous ruling by the Speaker that members must be referred to by their party and not as "them".

**Mr JOHNSON:** I meant the former Labor Government. We were going to see the total decimation of jobs in that city and the loss of the chance for young people to take advantage of skilled employment in those great workshops by way of apprenticeships in carpentry, plumbing, sheet-metal working, welding, fitting and turning and so on.

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I will come back to you.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr JOHNSON:** I have not finished with the honourable member yet.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member will direct his remarks through the Chair.

**Mr JOHNSON:** We saved the jobs in Townsville. We were on the verge of putting those apprenticeships back in place.

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I take that interjection in relation to those 77 contract staff. It was in your Ministerial Portfolio Statements. It was launched in Townsville by the Opposition spokesman for Trade and Economic Development. I raised the issue in the House with the Minister for Transport at the time. Because we embarrassed you into it, you have had to go back and honour your obligation. I have to say to you that, during my time as Minister, we never had a strike in Townsville.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the honourable member to direct his remarks through the Chair.

**Mr JOHNSON:** It was this Labor Government that had to kick those whom they believed to be their own in the guts. We had two-day rolling strikes in Townsville because you could not deliver on your policy. You wanted to renege on your policy. Nothing has changed on the Government side. We will keep reminding people that this Labor Government is not for the workers. It is the members on this side of the House who represent the workers. Most of us have been employers in the past. We understand the needs and requirements of workers. You have not got a clue when it comes to addressing the needs of people who are out there trying to have a go.

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I would sit back and be quiet if I were you.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I have reminded the member a couple of times to direct his remarks through the Chair. My patience is running out.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I am very patient, too. It is not only about job security and putting people into apprenticeships and into trades through Queensland Rail or some other private or public facility; it is also about the security and quality of life that those people deserve and need. That is something that the member for Townsville is not supporting me on. It does not matter whether we are talking about people in Townsville, Ipswich, Bamaga, Birdsville or wherever; they all deserve to be appreciated and to be given a fair go.

In this debate today, other speakers on this side of the House have elaborated on the coalition's excellent performance in this key area of policy delivery and outcomes, and I am sure others will follow. With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to make some specific observations of the minority Beattie Government's plans for increasing apprenticeships and traineeships in Queensland. Firstly, the plan proposes to introduce 6,000 traineeships for young Queenslanders in the Public Service over three years. This is a rerun of the Public Sector Traineeship Quota Initiative tried by the Goss Labor Government in 1994-95. At the time, a cross-departmental quota of 400 trainees was established and linked to a subsidy of \$5,000 for agencies which engaged a trainee who was long-term unemployed and registered with both the CES and the Youth Employment Service. The present Government could not meet the quota. That was despite a Government directive, significant promotion and the provision of substantial subsidies. It could not get its department to employ 400 trainees. Let us look at the logic. The Government has resurrected that program, increased the unattainable quota fivefold, apparently withdrawn the subsidies and expects to reach the quota. Nice thinking by the Minister! He must have worked really hard to think of that one.

However, I would like to refer to a promise made by the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Honourable the Premier, in a speech to the Construction 2001 Conference in Brisbane on 13 October last year. One of the great leaps forward announced by the then Leader of the Opposition was his plan to provide 150 houses per year under the Housing Industry Trade Training—HITT— Program for construction by 150 apprentices per year employed by group training companies. To its credit, the achievement of that figure will see the Government performing only marginally below the coalition's record when it was in office up to June. Though the recent Budget has changed the abovementioned statistical parameters, it really was not much of a promise by the then Leader of the Opposition. I say well done to the Honourable the Premier.

However, the Government also proposes 500 new Government apprenticeships at an annual cost of \$25m. Experience has shown that the public sector is largely unwilling to participate in providing apprenticeships over and above what is required within the work area unless the placement is heavily subsidised. The Government has recognised this and has provided for some of this subsidisation in the Budget. However, it cannot be denied that to take on apprentices in excess of what is required must lead to inefficient work practices, and this will undoubtedly be the experience in many areas of the Public Service. Let us look at an example from the private sector. Walkers in Maryborough is looking for contracts all the time. It is running 10% of its total work force as apprentices. That is a fantastic achievement. It employs some 800 people.

**Mr Bredhauer:** That's why we gave him the diesel tilt train that you complained about.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I am not complaining. I am talking about breaching the tender process. You know it, you clown! I have said it before and I will say it again.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! I remind the honourable member to speak through the Chair.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I am speaking through the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Minister for Transport wants to interject. He knows the rules. I just remind him again that he breached the tender process. However, we will go on.

Next is a \$5m proposal to provide a \$2,000 cash bonus to private sector employees or group training schemes for each additional apprentice employed in the areas of skill shortages such as tourism, building and construction, and the metal and engineering industries. I have a few concerns in this regard. The Government's statements and the Minister's public utterances do not provide a definition of what will constitute an additional apprentice. However, there are a number of problems associated with making this type of assessment, including substitution of existing workers as apprentices and the canning of those who would have been employed as apprentices as a matter of course. I might add that this does not equate to real apprenticeship growth, and the Minister and the Government should not pretend otherwise. By way of history, I say that traditionally State Governments have not entered into the provision of employer subsidies for apprenticeships or traineeship agreements.

**Mr Braddy:** What does this have to do with the Bill?

**Mr JOHNSON:** The Minister does not want to know about any constructive criticism.

Rather, the State has focused on ensuring that opportunities are provided in areas that meet the needs of industry and enterprise. Some members would be aware that, in the mid 1980s, the State Government offered a small range of employer incentives which proved difficult to administer. It was also difficult to demonstrate effective outcomes.

The Minister has provided no public evidence that the administrative structures necessary to overcome these pitfalls have been established. It may be of interest to the House to note that, under the coalition, the 1998 Annual Vocational Education Training Plan made provision for large allocations in the areas of skill shortages, including cooking, furnishing and food processing. Total allocations in these areas, including prevocational training, traineeships, apprenticeships and post-trade training was 49.2% greater than that delivered in 1996. This clearly showed a genuine and strong commitment by the coalition to help redress what were perceived skill shortages in the above vital areas of the economy.

To continue, the Government proposes 9,000 additional apprenticeships and traineeships in the private sector over three years, and I hope that it achieves it because, if it does, it is certainly going to be worth while. However, I doubt that the Government will achieve it. I find this proposal particularly ambiguous. Members will be aware that, on 5 September last year, the Federal Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs released the New Apprenticeship national campaign. As part of this, Queensland will receive \$126m for over 50,000 apprenticeships and traineeships over the next two years for the provision of incentives to employers, apprentices and trainees. Will the 9,000 additional apprenticeships and traineeships proposed by the State Government be in addition to the 50,000 provided for by this Commonwealth program?

With the time available I could continue, but the more that I look to the Labor Government's plan for our youth, the more I get depressed. Clearly, the Government made up of the members opposite does not have a genuine plan to create genuine apprenticeships and trainee opportunities, let alone a plan to create long-term and sustainable jobs. As my colleague the member for Clayfield stated, the minority Labor Government's policy priorities are in direct contradiction to its main objective—the jobs creation plan. I wish the Government well with its 5% unemployment target in the term of this Government and thereafter. However, the one thing I say is that we have to work together and we have to work together collectively with employers and unions. This Government has not done that to date.

Time expired.

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