



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Hansard 8 June 1999

STATE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS ORGANISATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—IND) (9.42 p.m.): I rise today in total objection to the State Development and Public Works Organisation Amendment Bill. As with most legally binding documents, much of the language used in this proposal is open to interpretation. Seldom in this document do we see clauses that are clear-cut black or white. To a great extent, the ramifications of these amendments hinge on the interpretation of one word by bureaucrats, the Coordinator-General and the Governor in Council of the day. That word is "significance".

I take this House to the bolstered land acquisition powers advocated in this Bill. At the heart of this Bill are powers that will enable the Coordinator-General to acquire land for the development of infrastructure by persons other than the State. It is quite clear from my reading of the documents that these powers—

"Are only available for infrastructure facilities that are of national, State or regional significance."

There is that word—"significance". What honourable members and I may consider significant may not be what the Coordinator-General considers significant, or what the bloke battling to pay off a mortgage considers significant. It is this grey area that concerns me.

Bulldozing some poor fellow's beloved Queenslander to build a supermarket may be significant to the Government of the day. It may create 20 jobs and improve the job growth statistics. It may be significant to the supermarket chain boasting a new outlet, even though some groups estimate that every supermarket-created job actually sacrifices 1.7 jobs elsewhere in the community. What we are losing sight of is the significance of the land to the property owner and the very real fact that this Bill threatens to ride roughshod over landowners' rights.

Forget the talk about compensation and privately operated public infrastructure. What gives us the right to forcibly take land from ratepayers on behalf of private enterprise? The fear and uncertainty of property owners in my electorate over land resumptions for the Government's proposed Burdekin bypass have been painful and messy enough without new laws that could let the corporate sector enter the fray.

Property owners have no rock-solid guarantees. Their land can be resumed by the Government for roads, dams, irrigation areas and hospitals. But the rights and securities that landholders do have are dearly held. They base lifelong plans and decisions around their rights. For example, they may buy a home close to work to keep down transport costs. They save for years to add a pool to that much beloved barbecue area that they have landscaped and nurtured over 20 years. They have invested in and renovated a dwelling so that it is no longer a house but a home upon which they could not place a price tag. They could establish a mango farm from scratch, knowing full well that it will be at least a decade before the trees bear fruit. They are prepared to wait those 10 years to realise their dream of being mango farmers, moulding the farm to exactly how they want it without the expense of buying an already established farm.

These are simple scenarios, I agree, but what right do we have to say that these scenarios do not carry heartfelt importance to those involved? Now this Government proposes to even further erode the already fragile securities of home and land ownership. Although the Bill refers to compensation, do

we want to be known as a Government that puts a price on everything and a value on nothing? Can this Government not understand that people do not just invest money in their homes and properties; they often invest their imagination, their creativity, their memories and their lives. No greedy corporate highflyer can put a value on that.

By all means, let these corporations approach property owners and enter into negotiations based on fair market prices. If property owners want to sell, good luck to them. Hopefully, those who choose to sell will make a nice little profit. But by no means will I be a party to a Bill that is the crowbar that lets Government prise rural battlers from their properties so that the corporate sector can make a profit from landowners' misfortunes.

A prime example of the unjust nature of this Bill is provided by residents of Woodstock in my electorate who are fighting to save everything they own from a proposed industrial project. Those property owners have formed their own land-holders group to fight attempts by the Queensland Government and the Honourable Minister for State Development and Trade to secure 3,610 hectares for the Townsville industrial land project—a project which—

"Would be attractive to industry on a global scale."

Is it really our role to kick people off the land that their fathers fought in wars to protect? Is it our role to do this on behalf of multinational corporate giants?

In relation to the Woodstock saga, I understand that land is available around the existing Sun Metals site. This land is under the control of another large corporation, but I wonder if the Government will have the guts to serve this large company with a notice of possible land resumption?

I smell a rat. I apologise for that terminology, but I do smell a rat. This Bill should be renamed the coveting Bill. Why? Because it is a tool that allows the coveter to obtain what he or she desires against the will of the original owner! Thieving chunks of Queensland's heartland from the rural backbone for auction to the highest bidder—whether it be an Australian company or not—is what is envisaged by this Bill. This Bill, if passed, will serve as a legal battering ram that allows private enterprise—the coveters—to prise, poke and explore at properties, even if it is against the will of the landowner.

I take honourable members to this snippet from the architects of this Bill—

"The amendment to include Division 6, Part 6, authorises the disruption of land owners' rights to enjoy the use of land they occupy in order to progress the development of an infrastructure facility."

I am sure that the majority of Queenslanders will be outraged to learn about the implications of this Bill. Imagine having a barbecue with friends by the pool on a Sunday, enjoying a few cold ones and the beautiful Queensland sunshine. Life does not get much better than that. Next minute, a BHP spokesman knocks on the door to tell the owner that a core sampling rig will begin drilling in the back yard in a few minutes. The drilling is being done in an effort to get enough proof to kick the landowner into the street. I know honourable members are all saying that this would never happen and that I am taking an extremist's view. But where are the Government's guarantees that it will not happen? The Government is granting these far-reaching powers. What is the dividing line between what is and what is not acceptable?

Once again, this is all subject to the future interpretations of the bureaucrats—the Coordinator-General and the Governor in Council of the day. I for one am not prepared to place my trust and the trust of my constituents and fellow Queenslanders in the hands of such a select few based on the framework of such an ambiguous Bill.

This Bill could be likened to the plot of an old American western movie: the rich landowner is trying to take over the poor little farmer's land. The rich landowner has thousands and thousands of acres and the poor little farmer has just 50 acres or 60 acres, but he has a nice little brook running through it. Here we have a Labor Party that is prepared to back the rich landowner's attempt to take that little piece of land off the battler.

That is not the Labor Party of which my grandfather was a member. I do not think that many members on the Government side like what they are hearing about this Bill. It backs a Tory style of Government, and I will not back this Bill. If this is what the Labor Party in this State has become, then the sooner it loses Government, the better.
