



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Hansard 2 March 1999

GORDONSTONE MINE DISPUTE; MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (6.41 p.m.): I rise in support of the Premier's amendment which, if accepted, makes the motion read—

"That this House, noting with concern the impact on jobs and business confidence of the Gordonstone dispute, condemns the Federal Government for its refusal to act to assist in the resolution of the dispute ..."

It is a damaging dispute that has attracted not only national but international attention. I would like to read into Hansard the facts of this dispute. This information is by courtesy of Andrew Vickers of the CFMEU. Members opposite are not interested in the facts. They are not interested in the fact that we are losing jobs in central Queensland, in areas that they represent, where they claim to be the champions of the bush. I will tell them some facts so that the people of Queensland understand.

Fact one: even prior to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission awarding compensation for unfair dismissal for the 312 workers sacked, the same commission had made an interim order requiring ARCO to provide preference to sacked workers in the event of the mine reopening because ARCO was actively advertising its intention to restart the mine as early as December 1997. The commission said that the workers should have their jobs back.

Fact two: in face of that order, ARCO changed its mind and decided not to commence the reopening. Fact three: the AIRC awarded monetary compensation to the workers because the reinstatement was not an option as ARCO told the commission that it was not restarting the mine. Fact four: in June 1998 the commission decided that there was no further need for the interim orders of December 1997 as ARCO continued to tell the commission that it had no immediate plans for restarting the mine. The interim order was therefore cancelled.

Fact five: within weeks of the decision to terminate the interim order, ARCO again advertised for labour and the union again made application to the commission. On that occasion, ARCO implored the commission to make a quick decision as it was intending to recruit labour and restart the mine by the middle of August. The commission issued an order requiring ARCO to give preferences of employment to the sacked workers. That was the second occasion that the commission had ordered ARCO to give preference to those sacked mine workers.

Fact six: ARCO again placed its restart plans on ice to avoid complying with the commission order. It walked away from that, because the commission had ordered that those sacked workers be given their jobs back. Fact seven: ARCO applied for a review of that commission order by a full bench. By a two to one majority the order was quashed. The union has appealed that decision and is doing so in the Federal Court on remittal from the High Court. The appeal by the union has been set down for hearing by the Federal Court on 7 April this year. We look forward to that judgment. Members opposite should be waiting to see what happens instead of launching this outlandish attack in the House today.

As to the attitude of members on that side of the House—I think about five members sitting on that side of the House have coalmining communities in their electorates. I am about standing in this place, standing alongside my constituents, to make sure that they get a fair deal. I am not hearing anything from those members over there about the businesses that are being closed down, about the businesses that are going bankrupt in the communities. I have not heard from them about the 200

empty houses in a town like Dysart, the four businesses that have closed since Christmas or the 20 businesses that have closed in Blackwater. Those constituents do not blame me; they know whom to blame. They are blaming the Federal Government, Reith and the lack of guts of members opposite to stand up to those in Canberra who want to run the lives of people and destroy families. Members opposite just do not care about that.

Mr Johnson: They don't want to talk to you.

Mr PEARCE: I am glad the member for Gregory interjected. I have a little story for the House about the member for Gregory. He went to the picket line last week, snivelling to the picketers in an attempt to get them onside.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr PEARCE: He knows what he said to Jim Lambley from the CFMEU.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr PEARCE: He told Jim Lambley that he supported the right of those people to choose their union.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Time expired.
