



Speech by

MIKE REYNOLDS

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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SUN METALS DISPUTE; GORDONSTONE MINE DISPUTE

Mr REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (6.41 p.m.): I rise to support the Premier's amendment and wholeheartedly support the Government's positive moves to resolve the industrial disputes that were brought on by the coalition's shoddy industrial relations legislation and to keep the business of investment and development in this State moving forward.

The Opposition talks about "can't do". The only "can't do" that I am hearing is from Peter Reith, and members have now heard it from Santo Santoro. Peter Reith quite comprehensively told us, in his public relations visit to Queensland, that the Federal Government would not be intervening in the dispute at Gordonstone. He said that the matter was one for the parties as to whether the dispute would continue to be fought in the courts. I can tell members why it is being fought in the courts. It is because the Federal Government's legislation has so watered down the authority and independence of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission that the parties have to go to the courts to get a binding decision. If they are not watering down the commission's authority through legislation then they are doing it with party political appointments to the registry.

If we are to speak of the threat to investment and the view of Queensland that our neighbours and potential investors get, then what they see is the coalition playing up these disputes—using them for all they are worth to score cheap political points and making absolutely no effort to solve them. It certainly appears as if Mr Reith, for one, thrives on a good bit of industrial disputation while he further erodes the power of the independent umpire that is supposed to resolve the disputes. It is under Reith that we have seen these long-drawn-out disputes, like the maritime dispute—a disgraceful dispute—and the Gordonstone dispute.

Peter Reith has already had two years in which to try to help the people of Emerald and the people who were sacked by Arco at Gordonstone. He has done nothing—absolutely nothing. This Government has been speaking to both sides—Rio Tinto and the workers—and trying to get them back to the negotiating table, despite the fact that this is a Federal dispute. Further than that, we have been working with Rio Tinto to put together a package that will provide long-term assistance—a future for the local community at Emerald.

In the Sun Metals dispute, we see the results of the unworkable industrial relations provisions that were introduced in 1997 by the Queensland chapter of the coalition—those members opposite. Much of Queensland's Workplace Relations Act 1997 bears startling similarities to Peter Reith's legislation, and certainly it is those flaws that have sparked the problems we see in Townsville. But regardless of the fact that we inherited this mess, the State Government is taking positive and progressive steps to fix it.

This Government is presently drafting legislation that will suit the needs of both investors and employees. It will do that because we took the time to speak to the parties and ask them what they needed in the legislation, to keep them off the picket lines and out of the courts and to get back to doing what all the parties want to be doing: working. Again, the Government is not sitting back but is taking positive action to seek to resolve this matter and to get the parties back to the negotiating table. If the matter cannot be resolved before the commission, we are prepared to fly in an independent negotiator.

The real image of Queensland that potential investors will get, if the coalition's overwhelmingly negative public relations machine, Mr Santoro, will let them, is the image of a progressive State with a positive Government that will seek their views and get things moving. Queensland is, in fact, a very attractive environment for business and investors. Queensland is Australia's fastest-growing State. Among other things, it offers businesses and investors generally lower taxation rates than other States; a highly educated and skilled work force, expanding with the growth in the State's population; lower average wage costs than in other States; and significantly lower labour on-costs, such as payroll tax and workers compensation insurance premiums. We also offer world-competitive energy costs, a well-developed infrastructure and a highly developed services sector. We offer assistance to manufacturing industries, including availability of serviced industrial land close to ports and major facilities. And doesn't the Opposition hate hearing this! We also offer an advanced scientific and technological skills base.

Queensland's strong economic position, its prospects for the future and its attractiveness to investors and migrants are based on its natural resources, a business environment conducive to success and a Government that is strongly committed to further economic development through private enterprise. It is a record of which I am tremendously proud. How is it possible that members opposite can condemn so successful an investment report card?
