



Speech by

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE**

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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Hansard 2 March 1999

#### **GORDONSTONE MINE**

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE** (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.35 a.m.): In recent weeks here in Queensland we have seen decent, law-abiding Queensland workers being prevented from going home from their place of work. We have seen decent Queensland workers being denied the opportunity to return home to their wives and children after going about their lawful business. Today, we have seen a Government that has not backed those people. All honourable members in this place agree that a right of dissent exists and is a fundamental part of our democratic society; however, today, we have seen a Government that has abandoned the rule of law.

Let us have a look at what has been happening at Gordonstone. A group of hardened thugs has been standing outside the gates to that particular mine stopping other Queensland workers, who were formerly unionists, who formerly worked there and came back, and others who joined the work force, from going about their lawful and legal obligations.

No-one argues that that particular union, and indeed the honourable member for Fitzroy, do not have a right to dissent, that they do not have a right to protest. That is not the issue. We live in a democracy and, in a democratic society, everyone has the right to protest and dissent within the laws of the land as they apply. There is an obligation on every member of Parliament, from the first law officer of the Crown down, to respect the sanctity of the law.

Today and in recent days we have seen a Premier, an Attorney-General, a Minister for Mines and Energy and a Minister for Education who have said, "If you do not like the law, break it. It does not matter in Queensland any more." That is a recipe for an anarchy. When we have the Attorney-General, the Minister for Education, the Minister for Mines, the Premier and the Government of the day saying, "It is okay to break the law", what sort of message does that send to the rest of Queensland?

No-one on this side has disputed the right of dissent. That is not the issue. The Government and this Parliament always have the right to change the laws that govern us. However, in case the Premier and his Ministers have forgotten, I remind them that we also take an oath of office and that oath of office, by affirmation or before God, makes a commitment in respect of our duties and obligations as members of this place. Today, what has happened is particularly serious indeed, because instead of saying, "We do not agree with the law. We are going to change it", we have a Government saying, "If you do not like the law, break it. As part of breaking that law, if you want to stop lawful Queenslanders going about their business, going to and from work, going home to their wives and kids in an atmosphere where there has been immense intimidation, that is okay." We have from the Premier, his Attorney-General, the Minister for Mines and the Minister for Education an open chequebook for trade union thuggery in Queensland.

Of course, just to make it a bit easier down the track, we are going to get new industrial relations laws. It is interesting to note that a couple of weeks back that can't do Premier leading a can't do Government for everyone except his trade union mates said, "I cannot get involved in Gordonstone; it is a Federal dispute." Now the Premier is saying, "We can't have all this confrontation. I am going to use Gordonstone as an opportunity to change the industrial relations laws in the State of Queensland." This is a massive capitulation to the trade union movement. Worse than that, it is a total surrender by this Labor Government to the thuggery that we saw at Gordonstone that prevented ordinary Queensland workers from going to work and going home to their wives and children.

Of course, it is more serious than that because this Premier says that he is obsessed with jobs. He keeps telling us that he is obsessed with jobs. We know that there are danger signs on the horizon. We also know that the parent company at Gordonstone is Rio Tinto. The member for Fitzroy placed his leader in an incredible position on the eve of the Premier's visit to London to discuss with Rio Tinto a potential \$4.5 billion investment in the State—potentially the biggest private investment in the history of Australia with the exception of the North West Shelf project in Western Australia.

This morning we had this incredible remark about how people throughout history have stood up to oppression and the suggestion that Mr Pearce's actions in having himself arrested for breaking the law and stopping other Queenslanders from going about their lawful business and returning home is somehow akin to standing up against the Nazis. The facts are simple. Queensland is being watched by the boardrooms of the world. In case the member for Fitzroy does not know it, there are lots of rocks around the world, there is lots of coal around the world, and there are lots of Governments that are going out and chasing investment—and meaning it—instead of mouthing empty rhetoric such as we have heard from the member for Brisbane Central. This is a particularly serious issue. It is an issue which will cause enormous damage to the State of Queensland and to the job creation and investment projects that we want.

The comments of the Premier, the Attorney-General, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Mines and Energy will send a cold shiver down the spine of every boardroom that is questioning whether it will invest billions of dollars in Queensland and generate tens of thousands of jobs here or go elsewhere to such places as Malaysia, Indonesia, Argentina or those particular countries in Africa where the circumstances may be better than they are here.

As I said earlier, no-one on this side of the House—as the Premier tried to suggest—has a problem with the right to dissent. We are the dissenters by virtue of being on the Opposition benches in this place. We all have an obligation to respect the law. Obviously, what we are about to see in terms of new industrial relations in this State is an industrial relations regime that hands control lock, stock and barrel to the union bosses in the biggest political pay-off that we have seen in Queensland political history. We are about to see the return of compulsory trade unionism. We are about to see the return of union preference. We are about to see new laws which mean that people such as the member for Fitzroy will be able to go about their business of disrupting the lives of others without being accountable. We are about to see old trade union labour back in town. We are about to see legitimacy or a licence given to the sort of union thuggery that we have seen at Gordonstone over the past few weeks.

I make a prediction here today, and it is this: business will not come here and invest if we hear comments such as those we have heard from the Government today. Business will not invest here in the light of the stated position of this Government in defending someone who is prepared to be arrested whilst attempting to prevent lawful Queenslanders going about their legitimate business. Investors will go elsewhere. This Government can forget about its 5% jobs target.

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