



Speech by

**Mr ROB MITCHELL**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

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Hansard 2 March 1999

**GORDONSTONE MINE DISPUTE; MEMBER FOR FITZROY**

**Mr MITCHELL** (Charters Towers—NPA) (6.46 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament tonight. As shadow Minister for Mines and Energy and the member for Charters Towers, an electorate in which mining is one of the mainstays of the regional economy, I hold grave concerns for the future of the industry and the future of miners' jobs under this can't do Beattie Government. All the indicators, and the industry itself, are pointing to another tough year ahead for the coal industry and the need for increased productivity to ensure our industry remains competitive and Queensland mines stay open. However, this Government appears totally oblivious to those indicators and unwilling to work with the industry in tackling those areas where productivity can be improved and jobs maintained.

This Government's endorsement of the illegal and job destroying behaviour of some on the Gordonstone picket, including the member for Fitzroy, provides stark evidence of that. The Gordonstone mine was previously closed for 18 months. Based on an annual contribution of \$25m in wages alone to the Emerald and Peak Downs communities, that closure cost those communities in the vicinity of \$35m. Add to that the lost returns to the Queensland economy as a whole, and the impact of the picket line in stifling the development of the mine is enormous.

The reopening of the mine by Rio Tinto and the subsequent employment of Queenslanders was hailed by the community and the coalition. One would think that the Beattie Government—this Government that claims to be obsessed with jobs—would share those sentiments. But over the last few weeks, we have seen once again that the "jobs, jobs, jobs" line is just that: a line of empty rhetoric.

This motion is not about industrial relations; this motion is about developing industry and creating jobs. It is about the basic rights of Queensland workers to travel to and from their work place. It is about basic law and order in this State. The statements by Government members on this matter in the Parliament this morning and previously in the media have left the industry in no doubt that, under this can't do Beattie Government, Queensland is not open for business, and many speakers have spoken along those lines.

The conduct of the member for Fitzroy is a disgrace. As one of this State's law makers, he has sent a clear message to the community that it is okay to be a law breaker. It is not surprising that the member for Mount Isa has once again shirked his responsibilities as Minister for Mines and Energy and endorsed the illegal thuggery of his colleague the member for Fitzroy. But for the Premier of this State to also endorse those actions shows a man bound by party philosophies and with a total lack of leadership. Matthew Franklin of the Courier-Mail hit the nail on the head on 20 February when he said—

"A great Labor Premier rises above sectional interests—be they business or labour—and acts for the good of the whole State. A poor Labor Premier is a captive of sectional interests and cannot put aside his alliances to make tough decisions."

This motion calls for leadership for the good of the State. It calls for the substance to back up the froth and bubble of this Premier. It calls for an end to the dispute which is costing the Emerald community and the Queensland economy millions of dollars and is hurting our reputation as an attractive development destination. This is not the only company that has mentioned to me that they are seeking alternatives outside Queensland and Australia. Until the Premier shows some leadership on this issue, mining and other industrial developments and the jobs that go with the developments will continue to be diverted away from Queensland.

To sum up, I quote Mr Clive Bubb, chief executive of the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who on 18 February stated—

"It is not in Queensland's interests to allow rogue members of any political party to undermine Queensland's generally good economic credentials. The Queensland Parliament has a duty to ensure that this behaviour is not allowed to set a precedent for the future."

I think that all members opposite should take note of that. I also urge all members to support this motion and let us get this mine up and running.

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