



Speech by

Mr S. SANTORO

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Hansard 2 March 1999

GORDONSTONE MINE DISPUTE; MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Mr SANTORO (Clayfield—LP) (6.10 p.m.): I am pleased to second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. The ongoing picket of the Gordonstone mine by the CFMEU is a tragedy for all concerned. It is a watershed issue for Queensland and it is a watershed issue for the resource sector in this country and in this State. It is not an industrial dispute at all. It is an attempt by a union to force on a company which has purchased a moribund mine and wants to reopen it the work force that the union dictates and not necessarily the best qualified people for the job. It is an outrageous intervention by a union which is prepared to use force, standover tactics and un-Australian behaviour to try to get its way. It is a situation that risks Australia's international reputation and could set back for many years future expansion of our minerals industry. It is a matter that requires high-level intervention and persuasion from the State Government because so much is at stake.

What we have seen instead is high-level intervention of quite the wrong kind. We have the Premier of the State, the head of Government, making in this place today the most astonishing claims in relation to the actions of his errant backbencher, the member for Fitzroy. The Premier, by drawing an incredible analogy between a self-serving union picket line and the heroic efforts of people from another era who combated fascism, has linked the mining company Rio Tinto with Nazism. If he really is interested in investment and in jobs, jobs and jobs—

Mr BEATTIE: I rise to a point of order. That comment is untrue and I seek for it to be withdrawn. I have never made any analogy between Rio Tinto and Nazi Germany.

Mr SANTORO: Yes, you did.

Mr BEATTIE: I seek for it to be withdrawn.

Mr SANTORO: If the Premier is offended, I will withdraw; the record can speak for itself. With the future prospects of Queensland at stake, what do we see?

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr SANTORO: I did say that I will withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER: The member will simply make the withdrawal.

Mr SANTORO: I did make my withdrawal previously, as Hansard will show.

Firstly, we see the local Labor member actually joining the picket line and being arrested. Then he told us—

"I really don't care what other members of Parliament think"—

and he didn't stop there. He said—

"Because I represent this area and it's fair enough for everyone to open their big mouths in Opposition but you have to prove that you're fair dinkum and stand alongside your constituents when you're in Government."

I would say to the honourable member that he is elected to represent all his constituents, not just a small minority of law breakers.

Just at the time the member for Fitzroy joined the picket line, the Premier was about to visit Rio Tinto in London to submit that Comalco, Rio Tinto's subsidiary company, should invest in a new \$4.5 billion smelter in Gladstone and not go offshore to Malaysia. Yet at this critical juncture, the Premier actually backed up the member for Fitzroy. We can be sure that this remark, along with his other utterings, has entered the record at Rio Tinto's corporate headquarters. He said—

"Jim Pearce is an old coal miner, an old miner, I mean why wouldn't he be standing up for the people he represents?"

I cannot recall any time in this State's history when a Premier has publicly condoned law breaking by a member of Parliament and tried to cover it with a veil of respectability. The Premier should have called last week for the union picket to be abandoned. The Federal Court has set a date in April to hear the dispute between the sacked Gordonstone workers and the former employer, Arco. Rio Tinto has been joined to this as a party to the action.

The Premier and the State Government should have said publicly that the courtroom is the right place to sort this whole mess out; that it cannot and will not be settled by illegal conduct at a picket line. This call is even more important because just a few weeks ago the Productivity Commission released its report into the coal industry. The report detailed the increased competitive and price pressures that Australian coal producers face. It also found that achievable improvements in productivity could add \$3 billion to national income within the next decade. The commission outlined at length that there are still many restrictive work practices that inhibit productivity in the industry. The commission found that industrial action by militant unions has been unacceptably high.

The commission also noted the benefits of the flexibilities provided by the Federal Workplace Relations Act. In reality, what Rio Tinto has attempted to do at Gordonstone is simply make a failed mine work and give a job to people who otherwise would not have one. At stake is the principle of whether an employer who is working within the law should be applauded for job creation or harassed and victimised by a union whose actions place jobs at risk.

The Premier is at least in good company when he makes the statements that he made today. Just days after Lord Mayor Soorley, at public expense, wined and dined the Irish nationalist Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams, this apologist for the IRA backed the CFMEU. The Premier is in very good company here, or rather bad company: the member for Fitzroy, the CFMEU and Gerry Adams. Who next will join this alliance for Queensland job destruction? Perhaps Saddam Hussein might write next in solidarity.

If this matter was not so tragic and so serious for Queensland it would be a joke. But it is very, very serious and the Government has let the people of this State down badly. On the altar of expediency and for the sake of union mates it has sacrificed business confidence, the building of bridges with Rio Tinto and respect for the rule of law.

Time expired.