



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

Hansard 16 March 2000

TEACHERS

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (6.10 p.m.): Tonight it is a pleasure to second the motion moved by the member for Gladstone. In common with her, I have been inundated with letters from teachers in my electorate. Queensland schools face months of turmoil and disruption as teachers and school administrators proceed to plan work bans and possible strikes over unsatisfactory wages and conditions.

The new enterprise bargaining agreement between the Queensland Teachers Union and the Labor Government should have commenced on 1 March 2000. To date no agreement has been reached, after over eight months of negotiations. The main dispute causing all of the delay concerns the Government's offer of a 3% pay increase for the teachers. The offer has been met with much disgust by the Queensland Teachers Union and is a great insult to the teachers themselves, as the honourable member for Gladstone said. Why? That is because of the claims made by the Premier when he was the Leader of the Opposition in 1997.

In March 1997 the Queensland teachers took industrial action against a 4% per annum salary increase offer made by the then Borbidge Government—an offer that the then Opposition Leader described as peanuts. He declared—

"... under my Government, this dispute would never have occurred. We would never have had this dispute because we would have given the teachers something decent."

I wonder what he meant by "something decent". Yet three years later the member for Brisbane Central, as Premier, is in a position to come through on his word. Obviously the member for Brisbane Central is all talk and no action—just like the stance he has taken on the GST and the National Competition Policy. Talk, talk, talk and definitely no action. He is all talk and no walk.

The Government has offered teachers an increase of just 3%—less than the peanuts offered by the former Borbidge Government. But to make matters worse, the Beattie Government has refused to negotiate with the union, adopting the "take it or leave it" attitude with its offer, as highlighted by the Queensland Teachers Union President, Julie-Ann McCullough. In a Courier-Mail article last month, Ms McCullough stated—

"You can't even call them negotiations because we have an official position on the table and so do they, and we need to have serious and meaningful discussions around those positions. They've put up this 3% percent and said take it or leave it."

Ms McCullough also said that the teachers were angry and that they still did not have a deal, despite announcing their claim in June last year. She has publicly announced—

"Industrial action is definitely on the cards if there is no movement. We've always said we're prepared to negotiate around the claim, but the Government isn't."

Why is that? Why is the Government denying negotiation with the Queensland Teachers Union? It seems that the Beattie Government is doing nothing other than force the teachers to take industrial action.

When Labor was in Opposition in 1997, the shadow Minister for Education—and we all know who that was; the member for Cook, a great champion of the worker—told this Chamber—

"The State Opposition understands and respects the right of all Queensland workers to take industrial action to achieve goals when they are so frustrated in their attempts to negotiate reasonable outcomes for workers on issues such as enterprise bargaining."

He also went on to say—

"Only Labor recognises that proper remuneration for teachers is part of a range of mechanisms which can maintain the high quality of Queensland's education services ..."

A lot more talk! It is time for the Premier to show some of that integrity that he keeps speaking about. He said some strong words whilst he was in Opposition in defence of teachers being remunerated adequately. In 1997 he claimed that the 4% increase was peanuts. I agree. Yet in the year 2000 he is offering only 3%. What is worse, it is a take it or leave it offer—no compromise and no bargaining from this supposed bastion of the worker. If this situation continues, it will be the children in our schools and in the schools in my area who will suffer and who will be the innocent victims.

This matter must be resolved and resolved quickly to the satisfaction of both parties. The City Country Alliance supports the motion to call on the Beattie Labor Government to negotiate meaningfully with the Queensland Teachers Union in relation to the current enterprise bargaining negotiations with a view to being just and equitable. We are asking that the result be just that—just and equitable. If 4% was no good in 1997, I hardly see how 3% is any good now, either.
