



Speech by

BRUCE DAVIDSON

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard 3 October 2000

COOROY TIMBERWORKERS

Mr DAVIDSON (Noosa—LP) (11.53 a.m.): In the Courier-Mail of Friday, 29 September Maree Duffy, Sunshine Coast organiser for the Australian Workers Union, said when referring to the closure of the Boral timber mill in Cooroy—

"When the doors closed today on the Nandroya Mill, it would mark the end of an era for the timber town."

She could easily have added, "And it has proven that the Premier of Queensland has misled timber workers in this State." On 16 September 1999, just over one year ago, in a press release about the South East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement Premier Beattie said—

"Any timber worker who wants a job in the timber industry will have a job in the timber industry. This is a triumph for my Government."

That is what he crowed, and then he went on to thunder about 471 new jobs that his Government would create with this momentous news by saying—

"This total of 471 new jobs, offsets potential job losses of about 80 in Noosa's immediate hinterland."

He stated this as a fact. On 21 September this year in an answer to a question on notice the Premier again stated—

"The Government has been at great pains to consult with people about the South East Queensland Regional Forestry Agreement which will deliver a range of benefits including ... almost 500 new jobs in regional centres."

What a pity he did not consult with the only people suffering pain over this issue at the moment—the Boral workers who are out of a job and the people of Cooroy who are out of pocket courtesy of the Premier and his Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development.

When this Government announced on 16 September last year that it and the conservationists had on that day signed an historic agreement to protect jobs and regional communities, the Premier said—

"This is a win-win for timber workers, the timber towns and the environment."

He claimed consultation and site visits all over the State to back up this comment, even quoting Cooroy. Who, I ask, did this Government speak to at Cooroy? It certainly was not the workers. I know what the owners were told because I met with the mill management the following day. They were told categorically that supply had been curtailed and that they were to be bought out—no alternatives, no other recommendations, no more licences to harvest, just, "Here is a deal to be bought out. Take it or leave it, but in any event, just go."

Here we have a Labor Government that, for the sake of peace and votes from the conservationist lobby, has sacrificed the jobs of its fellow unionists in Cooroy with not so much as a by-your-leave, and not even the courtesy of one word of warning of its intent to these members of the AWU—just a press release and the job's done. What a wonderful way to treat people whose union dues help to subsidise the Labor Party's election campaigns.

And if this was not insult enough to the hardworking and loyal employees of Boral, the barrage of false job promises that have followed to this day surely must be. The promise of 471 jobs has been

the cruelest insult to the timberworkers and the people of Cooroy who have lived in hope that work would be found for them. Last Friday, a very black day on the Sunshine Coast with the closure of the mill, the timber workers and the people of Cooroy found out the full extent of this duplicity.

I ask the Premier and his deputy again, as I have done continually since September 1999, "Where are these jobs? Show the workers of Cooroy the jobs. Table the exact places where the jobs exist", and following the Premier's answer of 21 September 2000, I ask: where are the almost 500 new jobs in regional centres that he claims to have created in his written response in this House? Can he tell the AWU rep on the Sunshine Coast where these jobs are to be found, because obviously she does not know where they are.

I challenge the Premier and his deputy to come up to Cooroy, a challenge previously offered but which they have yet to show the courage to meet, and to tell the Boral workers and the people of Cooroy where all these newly created jobs exist. Tell the timberworkers, and that includes not just those covered by the redundancy package, but those people he told on 16 September 1999 that "any timberworker who wants a job in the timber industry will have a job in the timber industry" just where the jobs are.

When Maree Duffy made her comment to the Courier-Mail she also estimated that 25 workers would move on to alternative training or jobs. She estimated; she did not even know. Of course she did not, because the jobs have never existed. Is it any wonder that the union rep can only estimate when her parliamentary representatives, especially the member for Capalaba, do not want to know about the loss of jobs in Cooroy or its effect on the economy?

Mr ELDER: I rise to a point of order. Just so that the member does not mislead the House, I state that, of the 31 workers, 19 have been placed in a job, five of them have taken a holiday and will come back to us and one has gone to Tasmania.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): There is no point of order.

Mr DAVIDSON: What a monumental disgrace these Ministers are to the working people of Queensland. It is not as though they have not had ample opportunity to meet with and discuss these matters with the timberworkers. I met with the Cooroy timberworkers within 48 hours of the announcement and discussed their problems about jobs and opportunities with them. I know first-hand their anxiety about their futures. We discussed the possibilities available to them that were realistic, and these included the possibility of redundancy packages such as had been paid to the Fraser Island timberworkers by the Goss Government. These recommendations have been forwarded to the Premier and, while some of them have been acted upon, I am still awaiting a response from the leader of this Government to the entire package as submitted.

The Leader of the Opposition visited these disillusioned workers to learn first-hand about their concerns. Why could not the Premier and his deputy who put this farce together show the same concern? But there was never a word from the Premier or his deputy other than a press release claiming, "I do not know what was going on on the Sunshine Coast." Never once was I able to tell the employees of the mill that their Government was doing something about their positions other than the mantra of jobs in the timber industry.

On 1 October 1999 I faxed to the Premier an urgent message asking him to meet with the mayor of Noosa, some Boral workers and myself to discuss these matters with these people on 5 October. To this very day there has not been a response, not even an acknowledgment that the correspondence has been received. I seek leave to table this correspondence.

Leave granted.

Mr ELDER: I rise to a point of order. The member is misleading the House. I have met with the mayor of Noosa and with the Cooroy implementation task force on a number of occasions.

Mr DAVIDSON: I understand that. The frustration that they have endured in the 12 months of meetings with the Minister and his staff has been a disgrace. I know that the Minister is totally embarrassed by the outcome he has delivered here. Out of frustration the mayor has since resigned from that working group because he could not advance the cause of the workers in Cooroy. I do not think that the Minister has ever met with the—

Mr ELDER: I rise to a point of order. I met with the mayor as recently as the Maleny Community Cabinet. We have discussed the opportunities for Cooroy and the redevelopment of both sites. The member could hardly be more wrong.

Mr DAVIDSON: I understand that as well. But why would the Deputy Premier not go up there and meet with the workers of the mill? Why has not he discussed these issues with the workers of the mill?

Mr Elder: If he wants to ask me the question, I will tell him. We resolved it through the union. There have been placements. The fact of the matter is that out of the 31, we have already placed almost three quarters in jobs. The others are waiting for placement.

Mr DAVIDSON: Where are they?

Mr Elder: On the return from their holiday break. The member has done nothing. He has failed.

Mr DAVIDSON: Mr Deputy Speaker, the Deputy Premier is debating the issue. While the Deputy Premier is answering questions, I ask: can he tell me where the 471 jobs are in the timber industry?

Mr Elder: If that is another question, I am glad to answer it. I will tell him now that there are 270 jobs in the softwood plant in Hyne's—

Mr DAVIDSON: Mr Deputy Speaker—

Mr Elder: Mr Deputy Speaker, he does tempt me to actually answer the questions.

Mr DAVIDSON: This inaction only reinforced the fact that this Premier does not have the courage to meet the Cooroy workers and their families. He does not have the courage to meet those other community members whose livelihoods were placed in peril—timber cutters, timber jinker drivers and others—without any recourse to redundancy packages for the sake of a few votes.

The Premier is very brave in this House, and that is exemplified no better than by his response in this House on 17 September 1998 in answer to a question asked by the Leader of the Opposition, in which he stated contemptuously—

"He is bitter because we have done a deal that protects jobs. I cannot understand why the Leader of the Opposition wants to be bitter about a success for Queensland. These people are not going to have a problem. They will have a job. He should not be bitter about it. This is about Queensland. This is bigger than politics. This is about Queensland jobs and Queensland's forests."

Let me inform the Premier of Queensland that the people of Cooroy are very bitter. They have a major problem. Despite the Premier's saying that there are no problems, they have a problem that is called no jobs—jobs that he promised them, 471 of them, on 17 September 1998 that have now miraculously climbed to almost 500 as of 21 September 2000, if we are to believe this unbelievable Premier.

The only thing that the people of Cooroy agree with the member for Brisbane Central on is that they should be above politics. It is painfully obvious that they are not, and never were. The only request of the townspeople, the Boral workers, the self-employed timber cutters, the transport drivers—those who are dependent on the timber industry—is that they should have the chance to hear from the self-proclaimed media tart in person as to why they have been sacrificed for the sake of a very few votes. If this is how the Premier of this once great State feels about Queensland jobs, as he has stated in this House, heaven help the workers of this State. If the Premier's performance in this very sorry saga of jobs for votes is the best he can offer as a can-do Premier, then the workers of Queensland will learn the real meaning of "bitter" when this Premier promises them jobs, jobs, jobs.

Mr ELDER: I rise to a point of order. There are only two groups who play politics on this: the Federal Government and this Opposition, led by the member.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr DAVIDSON: I rise to a point of order. I have met with those workers over a 12-month period. I know their frustrations and their concerns. They have not been addressed by the Deputy Premier or any of the staff of his department. The frustration is still there. The bitterness towards the Deputy Premier and his Government is still there. I will phone today to see whether any of those jobs that the Deputy Premier has talked about have been offered and have been put in place.

Mr ELDER: I rise to a point of order. They know where the Opposition is going. They promised a \$3m package from Tuckey and they cannot deliver it in writing. They want it from the Opposition. They cannot deliver it.

Mr DAVIDSON: No. The Deputy Premier has to deliver the mill. If he delivers the mill, we will deliver the package.
