



Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR WARWICK

Hansard 15 November 2000

QUEENSLAND RAIL

Mr SPRINGBORG (Warwick—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.14 p.m.): I rise to second the motion moved by the honourable member for Gregory, which was moved for very good reason. For a long time we have been hearing a lot of concern expressed about the future of railway workers and their families—people who have dedicated so much of their lives to ensuring that essential infrastructure and essential services are being distributed and delivered right across this State.

Mr Johnson: True professionals.

Mr SPRINGBORG: As the Opposition Transport spokesman says, they are absolutely true professionals, and I take pride in knowing them.

The rail lines in this State began operation some 100-odd years so, starting from a very small economic base. As a result of the commitment of Government and the dedication of those people who staffed the railways, Queensland had a very good rail service. Unfortunately, in recent times our rail services in Queensland have deteriorated. Morale in the railways has also deteriorated, and the actions of this Labor Government have not helped. As the honourable member for Gregory said, we have only to go back to the days when the Boy Wonder of the Government, the now Treasurer, David Hamill, presided over the Railways portfolio in Queensland to see what actually happened. Thousands of jobs were taken out of the railway system in this State and hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres of line were closed or mothballed by that Minister.

We all remember the notorious days when the Goss Government announced that it was going to close one third of Queensland's railways. We saw the protests right across Queensland. I think the honourable member for Callide led those protests in his electorate—and led them very well. We saw Wayne Goss shove his head out the window, sniff the breeze and say, "It's all a big mistake. We won't close as many of them." Nevertheless, many of them were closed or mothballed.

I think we need to realise that that essential infrastructure is still important. We have seen the demoralisation of railways staff—people who have given decades of service in our stations.

Mr Johnson: A lifetime of service.

Mr SPRINGBORG: As the honourable member for Gregory says, they have given a lifetime of service in our railway stations. We should see how those people who work on our lines—the fettlers, the maintenance people and the people who actually drive the trains—feel about what was once a great and proud Queensland Rail service and the direction in which it is now heading.

We have two options tonight. We can support the motion which has been moved so ably by the honourable member for Gregory and recognise the ongoing problem, or we can put our heads in the sand, as honourable members opposite want to do, and not consider the issues that have come so much to the fore. As the honourable member for Gregory said, if you go around and talk to these people, they will tell you that Labor does not care about them anymore and that they do not even see some of their union reps anymore. They just feel so worn down, neglected and rejected. It is about time the Government supported these people—whom it has been pretending to support for so long—instead of coming in here and feigning sympathy and understanding. If it does not do that, then this Government deserves to be condemned for its inaction and for the contempt with which it is

treating these people, who for so long have placed their faith and trust in this Labor Government. As I said, these workers are in despair; they are disillusioned and they feel very let down.

That is in stark contrast to the feeling within the bureaucracy. As I move around my electorate and talk to railway workers, they tell me that there never seems to be a problem with people in administrative positions. They all seem to be comfortable. Their jobs never seem to be under threat. But if you are out there jamming a dog spike in along the line, if you are carrying out maintenance, if you are putting the ballast in, if you are driving the train, if you are manning the station, then you can be forgotten about. In fact, many of these people write to me saying, "I have had enough of this. I want to take a VER. Can you help us get a VER, because we see absolutely no future in something that we have spent a lifetime supporting and building up." I think that is a sad indictment on this Government. You could be excused for thinking that it is a cold, calculated act on the part of this heartless Labor Government. Thousands of jobs are to go.

The situation in Townsville is a good example. Many people do not want to see the historical station moved somewhere out of town to make way for the new tilt train.

Mr Reynolds: You don't want the tilt train.

Mr SPRINGBORG: We all know the situation up in Townsville. I understand that there are further plans to amend the original proposal.

This Parliament must support this motion because it is all about supporting railway workers, people who have given so much, people who have given their all for—

Time expired.
