



Speech by

**Mr P. PURCELL**

**MEMBER FOR BULIMBA**

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Hansard 1 June 2000

### **TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT BILL**

**Mr PURCELL** (Bulimba—ALP) (3.49 p.m.): It gives me great delight to speak in the debate on the Training and Employment Bill 2000, which will benefit all Queensland industries. By entrenching the training plan into legislation as a key element of apprenticeships and traineeships, the Bill will ensure that every apprentice, trainee and employer in our State receives the high-quality training that they deserve. When more Queenslanders are confident that apprenticeships and traineeships provide worthwhile skills, more will be encouraged to embark on these important training programs. This will go a long way towards boosting skills in Queensland's work force, cementing our position as Australia's Smart State.

Queensland's building and construction industry provides an excellent example of employers and workers working together smarter and more effectively. This industry, like all others in our State, will benefit greatly from the new legislation. I congratulate the Minister on the hard work that he has done. It has not been easy. The building industry is an industry that pulls and tugs in all directions and has many different parts to it. There is the housing industry, which is nearly an industry apart from the commercial side of the industry, and there is also the heavy engineering or construction industry which undertakes projects such as power stations. I believe that to get all those people to sit down and have discussions with the Government over a long period and to have come to an agreement on the way in which training should be delivered is an achievement. It is no small feat that the Minister has been able to bring that together by talking to all the interested groups. In a lot of ways they are groups that have many different agendas, but the Minister has got them all to agree on training and how it should proceed.

With the assistance of the Government, the building and construction industry is helping Queensland become the Smart State by skilling workers and raising proficiency levels. From 1996 to 1997, the previous Government created only 1,280 additional apprenticeships in building and construction when about 2,000 were needed to maintain the level of trade skills. When the industry is very busy, people are working long hours. When extra skilled workers are needed, nobody has the time or money to put aside for training. Of course, when the industry is slow and in a down cycle, there is plenty of time for training but nobody has the money to train people. As a result, many people who are in the industry and who should be getting trained up leave the industry to go to other industries because there is not enough work for them. They may be getting only a few days a week and the overtime is down, and they are chasing the overtime rates to get a decent income. It is very difficult to get people trained for our industry without Government assistance.

Just two Budgets later, this Government has turned that record around. The first financial year of the Beattie Government, with Paul Braddy as Minister, saw new approvals of building and construction apprentices and trainees more than double, jumping by a massive 102% compared with the previous financial year. This financial year, there have already been 2,740 new arrivals in the industry, compared with 1,862 generated in the whole of the last financial year of the previous Government in 1997-98. With the help of the Beattie Government, the building and construction industry is winning the war against skills shortages. This is a significant contrast to some of the solutions proposed by the Opposition during the debate in this House on the creation of the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund.

The Training and Employment Bill 2000 allows the Government and industry to achieve more by providing the framework that will allow our training and employment strategies to work better. By discouraging non-completion and helping provide high-quality training, the legislation will allow our strategies to skill the building and construction work force more effectively.

The introduction of the Training Ombudsman will serve building and construction employers, apprentices and trainees well by providing a free, impartial access point for help throughout the life of apprenticeships and traineeships. The formal recognition of training plans for apprentices and trainees in the Bill means that they and their employers will be more fully informed about the training they will embark on. This will make the system more effective, discouraging non-completions while enhancing the quality of training received by apprentices and trainees.

The new legislation also formally recognises the important role that group training organisations have in skilling workers. Group training organisations are important for the building and construction industry because they allow host employers to employ apprentices and trainees for periods suitable to the industry and its variable economic cycles. I was one of those who, early in the piece, was fairly critical of group training. I believed that working for the traditional builder—one out, usually, with a family business—was the ultimate way to train apprentices. My experience with group schemes which move their apprentices around from housing to commercial to engineering—to different projects—is that the skill level that those apprentices obtain is far higher than if they had been with one employer who works within one type of industry all the time.

Previously I was seeing apprentices who were working mainly in the commercial area on high-rises. They would just become wood butchers, banging down decks and knocking up floors for 20 to 30 floors at a time. Their skills were limited. But now apprentices are moved around various employers, and they get to swing doors, put in windows, do stairs and treads and a whole host of other jobs that are needed to fill out an apprentice's training. When business is up, employers can call on these apprentices and trainees and help skill these workers to become qualified tradespeople. When business is down, the apprentices and trainees receive more formal training through their group training organisation.

The legislation will support the Government's training and employment strategies for the building and construction industry, particularly its Training Fund. This innovative fund is an example of how the Government and industry can work together to address training problems. The fund is innovative because it eliminates the need to administer a levy, unlike what happens in other States. Instead, it is financed through the proceeds of investments from the portable long service leave scheme. Each year the fund will distribute about \$5m to encourage employment and training in the industry. Since the beginning of last year the fund has helped employers such as group training organisations hire an additional 734 apprentices and trainees, with another 152 about to receive funding. This will create real jobs and real skills where they are needed to address skill shortages.

Last year State Cabinet approved a range of improvements to a significant strategy that is now strengthening training in the industry: the 10% training policy. By entrenching quality into training and discouraging non-completions—which is a big issue in the building industry; where people, for various reasons, exit the industry or they just do not have any more contracts, we are now able to move those young apprentices—the new legislation will ensure that this strategy achieves more for the building and construction industry.

After the failure of the previous Government to implement it, the Beattie Government has revitalised the policy to ensure that apprentices, trainees and cadets comprise 10% of labour hours on Government construction projects. This creates a level playing field that encourages contractors on Government sites to employ apprentices and trainees. With the quality provisions of the legislation, these apprentices and trainees will have the passport to gain valuable skills that will help them succeed at work. This will help skills in the industry, securing its future. Through the policy, the Government aims to create up to 900 additional training opportunities in the next three years. Since it was launched late last year, 74 apprentices, trainees and cadets have already benefited. It is clear that our target to create 100 opportunities in the first year of the policy will be met.

Other Government initiatives to benefit from the new legislation include the Housing Industry Trade Training Program. This program generates training opportunities for building and construction apprentices and trainees who are employed by group training organisations. By formally recognising the Housing Industry Trade Training Program, the Bill will secure the Government's investment in group training. Our commitment to group training organisations has worked. The program has already provided training opportunities for 507 apprentices and trainees since October 1998.

One can see that the new Training and Employment Bill 2000 will greatly benefit the building and construction industry. All Queensland industries are set to reap the rewards from the new legislation, which will protect the Government's investment in training. Each industry will benefit from

streamlined administrative operations and contact points, greater awareness of training and formal recognition of the important elements of the training system.

I want to comment on the amount of work that the Builders Labourers Federation, of which I am still a member, has done in training. Just before I left that organisation to take up this job, we were setting in place a training regime within the federation. We had put on training officers and we had started to gear up our offices. Back in the days when builders employed their own labour, labourers had an opportunity to train. The training involving learning from one's workmates. There was no formal training involved. The Builders Labourers Federation has changed all that. It now has one of the largest training units in Queensland for non-skilled labourers—if not one of the largest units in Australia.

When work is slow, workers have the opportunity to undertake training at no cost to themselves. One of the largest classes we had was an English class. A lot of people in the building industry—particularly in the labouring area and in the underskilled area—are not Australians by birth. They have some difficulty in reading and writing English. Some of our larger classes involved teaching people to read and write.

I introduced a quarterly magazine. I can assure honourable members that the way to get information across to union members is to send the information home to the workers' wives. I was almost lynched after I sent home the first copy of the quarterly magazine because I included the wage rates in the magazine. The wives found out what their husbands were being paid. The workers were not very happy with that. However, the wives were very happy. We had a lot of approaches from the wives and children of workers who asked us to provide union members with training.

We now have not just English classes, but classes in such areas as concreting, steel-fixing, scaffolding, hoist/winch driving, dogging, rigging, and driving such pieces of machinery as bobcats, backhoes and cranes. We have training for labourers in most areas. This formal training can be undertaken at the builders labourers centre at Rocklea. It is one of the largest training centres in Queensland.

I would like to thank the Minister, Paul Braddy, for the training scheme that he has helped to initiate in my electorate at the Balmoral Uniting Church centre. We have an old house in which we operate about 10 different programs. These programs assist people in my electorate. Originally, it was a very small house with very small rooms. It was not really appropriate for the amount of work that was carried on in those premises. We had many people coming to the centre to undertake courses.

Various organisations have contributed to the setting-up of the centre. I refer particularly to the department, Biga Training, Shane Cowan's organisation at Stones Corner and the Balmoral State High School. Students from that school undertake training in the building industry at the centre for one day each week.

We are going to put the verandas back on that old Queenslander and make the rooms bigger. We will also add some extra rooms. The community in general will benefit from the work and training that is carried on at this centre. It will not take long for the community to see results from the 60 to 80 volunteers who work out of the centre.

I have pleasure in supporting the Bill. I see it as a very positive step forward for training in Queensland in general, and for the building industry in particular.

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