



Speech by

Mr ROB MITCHELL

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard 15 November 2000

QUEENSLAND RAIL

Mr MITCHELL (Charters Towers—NPA) (6.40 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Gregory that reads—

"That this House condemns the Beattie Labor Government for its betrayal of rail workers and their families by robbing them of thousands of jobs and for its plans to reduce rail jobs even further, putting economic development, rail safety, community prosperity and families at risk."

The facts that surround this motion are that this corrupt Government that duped the Queensland public with its so-called jobs, jobs, jobs policy has now betrayed the rail workers across the State. There is no better example of this betrayal than the disgraceful betrayal of the railway workers at Townsville. Just to refresh the memories of members in the House, I state that it was Townsville where the Goss Labor Government planned to close the Townsville railway workshops in appreciation of all the support that it had received from the loyal rail union members at the Townsville workshops. I well remember that the front page of the Townsville Bulletin of 24 March 1994 carried a photo of the railway workers holding up a banner stating "Workshops to stay or the ALP will pay". The member for Gregory and I were there that day so I know exactly what went on. There was no Labor member there to support them, but we were there supporting the workers.

Mr Johnson: Wayne Goss turned his back on them—240 of them standing out the front.

Mr MITCHELL: He did, too. He went straight through and rushed into the restaurant. He never said a word to the workers about where the Labor Government was going.

We all know that this stupid policy of the Goss Labor Government was a factor in the defeat of that Labor Government at the next election. As the shadow Minister for Transport and Main Roads said earlier, Labor candidates for that election actually admitted that they had been wrong in not listening to the rail workers. The only thing that has changed is the banner, which will now read "Jobs to stay or the ALP will pay". This Government has ridden roughshod over railway workers and has presided over the scrapping of thousands of jobs in the last 12 months.

The impact of these job losses in the towns and cities across Queensland is having a dramatic impact upon the economic future of this State, but it is not the job losses alone that are of concern to rail workers, it is the manner in which they are being administered. I am aware of the daily calls to coalition members' offices that have been mentioned here tonight complaining about the job slashing agenda and the manner in which the VER packages are being administered. It is not me calling it a job slashing agenda, that is what the Queensland Service Industrial Union is calling it. Let us remember that this VER offer was supposed to have closed in April this year but I know that selected officers are being told that, because there are no guarantees about rail jobs under the Government, they had better take VERs while they can. Other workers who applied before April have still not heard if they are to be considered or not. They tell me that they have called the Minister's office and the QR industrial relations section but are complaining that they all are getting the run-around.

On the other hand, I know of a case in Bowen where a worker who did not apply for a VER before April was advised that QR was keen to close down his section and that if he applied for the VER, even though applications had closed, he might still be considered. He was considered all right. He was paid up and gone by the end of that week. This is what Labor calls job security and certainty. Obviously,

as we see in so many other aspects of this Government, the only certainty is that any person who trusts Labor will get it in the neck.

I mentioned before the flow-on impacts that the loss of rail jobs has in the community but other job losses have also resulted from this Government's mismanagement of the rail system. Earlier this year Goninan North Queensland laid off 60 workers, cutting its work force in half. The Queensland secretary of the AMWU, David Harrison, said the rail losses were due to the Queensland Rail decision to defer the production of 200 coal wagons and the impact of imported products.

Another familiar critic is the well known Grasshopper previously mentioned in this place, the former Labor Government candidate Barry Gomersall, who said in November last year when he gave Labor the flick that one of the major issues in the next election was ensuring the long-term prosperity of Queensland Rail jobs. Included in this list of critics are the AMWU delegates from the Rockhampton workshop who sent a letter to the Premier after the meeting on 3 March 2000 which advised that the meeting passed a vote of no confidence in the management of QR and the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads, Mr Bredhauer.

So it is not just the coalition that believes that Labor is betraying the rail workers of Queensland. This unconscionable action by Labor is a major concern for rail workers and rail unions. I am confident that the Labor Government will regret the way it has treated the rail workers. I certainly hope that is the case. The member for Mundingburra and the member for Townsville, in particular, will have cause to regret their broken promises to the workers in Townsville come the next election. I am not sure why the Premier is so scared of facing the House in two weeks' time, but I suspect that some of his friends from north Queensland will be grateful—

Time expired.
