



Speech by

**VAUGHAN JOHNSON**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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Hansard 15 November 2000

**QUEENSLAND RAIL**

**Mr JOHNSON** (Gregory—NPA) (6.04 p.m.) I move—

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

This Government, which came to power on a bogus jobs, jobs, jobs agenda, has been presiding over the decimation of Queensland Rail commenced under the previous Goss Labor Government. Under that Government, under the supervision of the now Treasurer and the now Deputy Premier, we saw the mothballing of almost 1,500 kilometres of Queensland Rail line and the loss of thousands of Queensland Rail jobs. Prior to the last election, Government members went around Queensland Rail workshops and other establishments beating their chests and saying that they were sorry for their attack on rail workers and that, if the rail workers only trusted them and paid their union dues, they would be protected.

I will quote part of the confession from campaign '98. In relation to Townsville, page 11 of the regional economic strategy states—

"We are now willing to acknowledge that the removal of the heavy duty workshop and engineering capacity from Townsville was wrong."

Labor promised to upgrade the Townsville workshops. Labor promised—and again I quote from the campaign document—

"There is an obligation on Government owned enterprises such as Queensland Rail to provide certainty and job security."

I trust that the member for Mundingburra and the member for Townsville made special note of this commitment they gave to rail workers in Townsville, because I can assure them that in the not-too-distant future they will be reminded of it time and time again. Mr Speaker, I can give you that assurance. I was there two weeks ago, and I can assure you that the rail workers in Townsville are in no mood to argue. The unions made their point and extracted a promise from the now Premier and got him to promise them that, if he gained office, he would not appoint the then shadow Minister for Transport, the member for Capalaba, as Transport Minister. They said, "We can't trust the member for Capalaba as Minister. Can't you find somewhere to hide him along with the member for Ipswich, who also duded rail workers?" The current Premier must have said, "I've got a new job for you. You can be Deputy Leader. But because no-one can trust you and your AWU faction, we won't give you the Treasury purse strings; we will just give you the title, and that way we can keep the rail unions on side."

**Mr Sullivan:** What have you been eating?

**Mr JOHNSON:** I can assure the honourable member that I have not been eating anything. I issue an invitation to the member for Chermide and any other member of the Labor administration to come to Townsville with me the next time I go, and I will give them a guided tour of the blue-collar workers in that city. We can meet with as many workers as the member likes. I can assure the honourable member for Chermide that he will hear things that will not be favourable to his side of politics.

Without a transport policy to bless himself with, the member for Cook lost the raffle and got the Transport and Main Roads portfolio, where he hid for 12 months in case someone asked him a question and played with his tilt train to Cairns project, in respect of which no tenders were called. Do members remember that he was going to do away with the Sunlander and then realised that there would be less passenger capacity than already provided? Then he was going to use the Sunlander to replace the Inlander, which had just been done up. But, of course, worse was to come.

It was not long, however, before he found the old policies of his colleague the member for Ipswich, the former Minister for Transport, and the member for Cleveland went and got a bright new shiny axe of his own. The rail workers and the rail unions were betrayed by the Beattie Labor Government just as they were betrayed by the Goss Labor Government about six years before. It was not long before the axe was being wielded. On the Government's own figures, it has cut over 1,000 jobs from Queensland Rail. Even the Queensland Services Union refers to this as Queensland Rail's job slashing agenda.

So this Government, this Treasurer, this Minister for Transport and local members representing rail towns, such as the member for Townsville, the member for Mundingburra, the member for Rockhampton and the member for Mount Isa, after giving an assurance to rail workers about certainty and job security, have slashed 1,000 jobs from QR and, according to the unions, there are another 1,000 to go. So we have the previous Transport Minister, the member for Capalaba, doing feature articles about job creation while thousands of rail workers—good hardworking union members—are sold down the drain. These are traditional ALP supporters. He and the Premier would rather give millions of dollars to overseas billionaires to create a couple of hundred jobs than look after the hardworking rail union members whose hard-earned union dues funded this corrupt Government's suspect move into office. By the way, they tell the story at Ipswich workshops about the first election campaign of the member for Ipswich, when they took around the hat to support his campaign. A lot of workers threw in dollars that they could have well used at home to feed their families.

**Mr Springborg:** They were let down.

**Mr JOHNSON:** As the honourable member for Warwick said, they were let down.

Do honourable members know how he repaid his debt? He sacked them. He got rid of the lot of them. He shafted them. Is it any wonder that all the rail unions are now gathering their forces to clobber this Government in the forthcoming elections? It is not just the sheer hypocrisy of this Government that worries the rail workers of Queensland and it is not just the broken promises and lies, it is their fear for the future integrity of our rail system and for the future of communities in which they live and bring up their families. They have very genuine concerns about the workload that will be passed on to remaining workers. They are concerned about the occupational safety of workers. They are concerned about the intrinsic safety of our rail system.

While the member for Cook fantasises about his high-speed train running to Cairns at nearly 200 km/h, we have rail workers concerned about the safety of existing operations. These workers are worried that they will be letting their customers down as they are expected to do more with less and less. They are concerned about the fact that the patronage for QR is dropping and, therefore, the commercial operations which they try to protect are slowly finding other means of transport. They are concerned that they will be forced to do unpaid overtime to do the work that used to be done by those being thrown on the scrap heap by this heartless and deceitful Beattie Labor Government. They are concerned that they will again be betrayed, as they were by QR's failure to tender for the central Queensland contract that it gave by default to the New South Wales Government's Freightcorp.

The rail workers of this State are worried about the impact of these job losses upon the communities within which they live. As this Government has been eager to point out in relation to the creation of jobs, there is a flow-on effect. It is a fact that the abolition of jobs will have a flow-on impact in the community. We witnessed that in Townsville under the Goss regime, which could have cost that city anything up to \$15m per annum in lost revenue to commercial operations that do business with QR. There will be fewer jobs for our children. A reduction in the size of the work force has an immediate impact upon the economy of the community. Many of our rail workers are employed in regional, rural and remote Queensland. In these towns the loss of jobs can have a drastic impact upon the local community. The loss of jobs can result in the closure of schools, the closure of stores and the loss of services, which has been evident right across this State.

As the members opposite slink away from this House and seek to avoid being accountable to the Parliament, I can assure them that they will not escape from the judgment of the rail workers of this State who have been betrayed by the Beattie Labor Government. Once again it has been the coalition that has had to stand up for the workers in this State.

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr JOHNSON:** The member for Townsville can sneer and laugh. If he knew what his credibility rating is in the Townsville workshops and amongst the blue-collar workers in Townsville, he would not be sitting there with that smug look on his face. I will give him the mail: there is more to come for him, not just from the people of Townsville but from people outside of Townsville. I do not move this motion lightly.

Time expired.

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