



Speech by

Hon. K. LINGARD

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

Hansard 21 June 2001

BUDGET DEBATE 2001

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (4.00 p.m.): One of the groups that has been most controversial in the area of Beaudesert has been the Beaudesert Bus Action Committee, which has continued to call for seatbelts to be installed on buses and for the prevention of students standing on school buses. This is an issue that some of us face as members of parliament whenever we get a controversial area.

I certainly have a very controversial area in my electorate. It is a 30-kilometre stretch of road between Jimboomba and Beaudesert where school buses travel. One of the types of buses that travels that road is a banana bus, which has two sections. It can carry up to 120 students, with 80 seated and about 40 standing. It can be quite a frightening sight to see 40 students standing in a school bus travelling at 100 kilometres per hour down a main highway which also carries many, many large vehicles. It is that problem which has activated this school Bus Action Committee. There have been minor incidents, and of course the Bus Action Committee is very concerned that a major incident will occur. Initially we should be aiming to have all students seated on school buses, especially when those school buses travel on open highways.

We have attempted to have such a policy put in place, but it has been impossible to work with the Minister for Transport to even try to have any concessions made towards school students being seated on buses travelling on main highways. I believe that once we get that, then we can start to move towards installing seatbelts. As people would realise, before the last election the coalition promised that \$22 million would be allocated towards starting to install seatbelts on school buses. Of course that was ridiculed by the government—a government which stated that it would cost over \$500 million to implement seatbelts on school buses. If we started today and tried to install seatbelts on all school buses tomorrow, I doubt whether we could even do it for \$500 million. However, that is not the idea. The attitude is that sooner or later we are going to have to accept that in modern society all students travelling on school buses on open highways, where buses travel at 100 kilometres per hour, should at least be seated and, secondly, that seatbelts should be provided.

As we know, a policy has been commenced providing that students travelling in buses in mountainous and hilly areas, especially around places such as Mount Tamborine, are required to be seated, and that is an excellent policy. Certainly other decisions can be made. We have been saying to the Minister for Transport that surely in areas such as the single-lane highway between Jimboomba and Beaudesert, where it is nearly impossible to pass any vehicles at any time, all students should be seated on those buses. That is what this group has been fighting for. I commend people like Kim Bax and Kim Limberg, who really have been the main activists.

We know that the day before the last state election the government announced that a certain task force would be set up under Dr Cherrell Hirst. However, we believe now that that task force has been superseded by a report from the Australian Transport Council's draft national bus action plan, which was released last week. This plan has been endorsed by state and federal transport ministers. An article that appeared in the *Beaudesert Times* states—

... the Austroads report recommends safer buses, safer bus stops, more involvement of parents and teachers and the introduction of a national school bus safety action plan.

It aims to reduce the number of fatalities involving school children travelling to and from school to zero.

The difficulty is that absolutely nothing in relation to this issue has been allowed for in this particular budget. So it is quite obvious that, whilst this task force will report in September, this government is already saying that there is going to be no more action towards resolving the problem which is occurring. This problem is not just occurring in Beaudesert. I know that the member for Fitzroy and other members have had difficulties, and people generally have a difficulty as soon as there is a crash or some other problem.

Even the Premier is answering letters now by saying that they are more concerned with the stop-off areas and the bus stops than they are with what is happening on the buses. Mr Bredhauer is continually saying that school bus travel is essentially safe and that students are more at risk around school buses. He says in a press release—

'This is particularly so when students are boarding or alighting school buses,' he said.

The Austroads report concludes that most road casualties involving children commuting to and from school by bus occur outside the bus.

It also reported that over three years of national data, two out of 24 child fatalities associated with school buses were passengers in buses involved in a crash.

I do not believe those figures are good enough for this government to turn around and say, 'We will provide absolutely nothing in the budget. We will now concentrate on bus stops. We will not concentrate at all on anything to do with seatbelts or anything to do with trying to stop the problem of students standing on buses.'

I know the government was faced with a difficulty. It was hard to make a bland statement and say, 'We will remove all students standing in school buses,' because of the opening of the new busway along the South East Freeway. If it said, 'There will be no students travelling on any school bus,' it would have really had difficulties. I appreciated that particular problem. But that is why I am saying that with respect to specific areas which would be regarded as dangerous areas, such as mountainous areas, the government should say, 'This is an area where we will fund extra money to make sure students are not standing on a bus.' Surely any member who has an area like mine in their electorate where buses and trucks travel on a highway which has a 100 kilometre per hour speed limit would say, 'That is a very, very dangerous area and that is an area where you should bring in a specific rule.'

The minister did start a trial in the Park Ridge area. He said that in that area all buses would travel at 80 kilometres per hour. Of course that is difficult, especially when massive trucks travel down the highway and the school bus is travelling at only 80 kilometres per hour and especially when it is a particularly hilly area. As the bus drivers would say, you cannot keep up 80 kilometres per hour travelling up the hills. So they would be dropping down to 60 kilometres per hour and lower and they have trucks and vehicles behind them. That is all right on a four-lane highway, but it is difficult on a single-lane highway.

That policy also says that the minister would not allow students to travel when they are standing for more than 18 kilometres. That cut-off point was decided because I had an instance in my electorate where the school bus travels for 20 kilometres. Of course, there is the ridiculous situation in that that policy does not apply to a school bus travelling only 17 kilometres. I say to the minister and to the government that making students travel on that sort of a highway standing up for 17 kilometres is absolutely ridiculous.

There are a few other points that I would like to quickly refer to in terms of education. As I travel around the schools I am quite impressed with what is happening with the key learning areas and the new basics. However, the government is going to have a particular problem very soon if it is not careful with workplace health and safety regulations for teachers. As all of these students are being retained in years 10, 11 and 12, who would not be regarded as academic students, who are now doing more basic-type subjects and more subjects which are aimed at getting them out into the work force, there is a need to change the curriculums in the schools. There is a need also to adapt and make sure that there are variable morning tea hours and lunch hours so that sometimes students can travel to another school to experience their programs. If the government continues to adopt the policy of not upsetting the Teachers Union by refusing to vary work hours and lunch hours, it is going to find it considerably difficult to implement many of these programs.

As I go around to the schools I find that most of the teachers in the schools are accepting the need for key learning areas and the new basics. They are accepting the need to change their curriculum and to bring in specialist teachers, but they have problems in changing their curriculums which become so tight that they would like to have an extra hour at the end of the day, more common lunch hours or shorter lunch hours so that they can fit in their curriculums. The other thing that is clearly happening in schools now that they have moved away from corporal punishment—and I was a great advocate of corporal punishment as a high school principal—

Mr Mackenroth: You loved it.

Mr LINGARD: Yes, I loved it.

Mr Swarten interjected.

Mr LINGARD: The members opposite all start to scream but, as I have always said, I had Queensland's largest high school and I did not have a mark on a desk or a chair, I did not have a cigarette in the school and I did not have one piece of paper littering the school grounds.

Mr Swarten interjected.

Mr LINGARD: Here goes the member for Rockhampton. The member for Rockhampton reckons that all the marks were on the kids.

Mr Swarten: You used to flog them.

Mr LINGARD: We had very strong discipline. The new regulations with regard to suspension mean that students are running around the streets. These regulations do nothing at all—

Mr Swarten: You were like that on the football field.

Mr LINGARD: There was one bloke I could not catch at Fitzroys, and that was the member opposite. He was hopeless as a footballer.

Mr SWARTEN: I rise to a point of order. I never, ever played Rugby League for Fitzroys in Rockhampton. It just shows what a liar the honourable member is.

Mr LINGARD: As I said, I could not coach him at all.

Mr Swarten: I wasn't in the team. I wasn't there.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order!

Mr Swarten interjected.

Mr LINGARD: The member opposite certainly did not play for Fitzroys using that sort of language.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Rockhampton will come to order.

Mr LINGARD: One thing that happens in this House is that the member opposite gets away with murder as far as his foul mouth is concerned.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Beaudesert will direct his comments through the chair.

Mr LINGARD: He uses language like that, language for which he has not been pulled up by the Deputy Speaker.

There are suspension programs in schools and students going out on suspension but hardly any programs for the rehabilitation of those students. There is a massive problem in our schools at present with the number of students who are not attending high school because they are suspended. The teachers and principals know there is a problem, but nothing can be done. It is up to this government to start to look at programs for those students on suspension. Students on suspension have to attend specific programs which will assist them in their academic career and assist them in their discipline and control. At this stage, this government is not looking at that at all.

Another problem relates to the P&C associations. I want to read into *Hansard* a letter I received from a small school—

... with an enrolment of 27 students from 18 families.

I wish to bring to your attention a problem not only we are facing but all other P&C Associations as well. This being the increase in the public liability insurance cover that the Associations must pay each year.

Last year our premium was \$76.14. This year it has increased to \$239.67 plus G.S.T. costs. This is a significant increase, approximately 150%.

Without the P&C's Public Liability Insurance, volunteers that help in so many areas could not be used. Ultimately our students will suffer ... By reassuring some form of core funding from the Government to cover increasing liability costs, it will alleviate financial burdens on the P&C Associations and enable us to continue to provide essential volunteers for our children's future.

Another problem with the education system that needs to be looked at soon is an issue that received some media coverage the other night. It is completely ridiculous for university students to do what they felt they had to do at the Queensland University campus at Pinjarra Hills. I remind members of the Ted Brown report, which states—

The Adams Working Party recommended that Veterinary Science should remain at its present major locations at St Lucia and Pinjarra Hills. This view was endorsed by the overwhelming majority ... of those who addressed the matter in submissions or with whom it was discussed. This view is endorsed on both academic and pragmatic grounds.

That is not completely true despite the finding of that report. There is certainly dissension as to what should happen at Pinjarra Hills. As we saw on TV the other night, because those university students reacted to this decision by protesting, the government has to look at resolving that problem as quickly as it can.

I turn to employment and training, because there are massive problems with traineeship programs. This state's economy is tipped to grow by four per cent in 2001-02. Its employment growth is two per cent whilst the unemployment rate is eight per cent, which is despite a four per cent growth rate, and the state government is ruling out any labour market reform. If it is still running with an unemployment level of eight per cent—and some reports say nine per cent—and a youth unemployment program of 31 per cent, there is no use sitting here and saying that there are magnificent programs in place. There is no use continuing to allow Minister Foley to stand up and talk about these magnificent programs if unemployment is still at nine per cent and youth unemployment is still at 31 per cent. Something is going wrong, despite spending massive amounts of money.

As anyone who knows anything about the traineeship program knows, there is a lot of skulduggery going on. Many companies are making a lot of money out of traineeship programs but not placing people into employment. There is no use talking about these great programs if only initial training is provided whilst the company reaps massive returns but there is no return at the end for the person involved in the traineeship. The budget talks about a Community Jobs Plan and the Community Employment Assistance Program. It says that these programs will create job placements for the long-term unemployed for up to six months. What happens to these people at the end of six months? Is this yet another bandaid? To all those members opposite who say that these are great programs, I say: do not forget what is happening to these people at the end of the six months. Many people do not get employment at the end of the six months and therefore really the program is a waste of money.

The budget also says that the Training and Employment Act 2000 introduces multiple improvements based on the findings of the 1999 independent investigation into the quality of training in Queensland's trainee system. However, this is clearly not working. There are concerns in industry and in Canberra regarding the quality of some RTOs—registered training organisations. Members of parliament continually receive reports about those RTOs that are not doing the correct thing. We continually receive reports that the people involved in the RTO schemes are not visiting students and giving them the training programs that the students need. All the money in the world does not make a difference if TAFE colleges are not financially friendly to those people who need to access those programs or if the TAFE campus does not listen to the needs of the community and provide programs which suit the needs of their community, because the cost of many TAFE courses prevents many young people from accessing them.

There is money in this budget for the Browns Plains TAFE. That is excellent as far as the capital improvement to Browns Plains TAFE is concerned. As the member for Logan knows, there has been a problem with students accessing the Browns Plains TAFE. For students at Park Ridge High School, which is located within the electorate of the member for Logan, and students in Beaudesert it is all right if they want to come straight up the highway in order to get to Browns Plains TAFE. However, if they are not immediately on the highway but have to access that particular campus, it is impossible. Somehow in these TAFE training programs something has to be provided for young students in terms of the cost of travel to these campuses. If nothing is done about this, we are providing capital improvements to the Browns Plains TAFE but students cannot access them.

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships are a brilliant option, particularly for non-academic students who want a trade. The Beattie government's commitment to continue to increase school-based apprenticeships and traineeships is commendable. However, funding for schools to employ staff to implement, administer and maintain such a program is an absolute must. We should ask Minister Foley and his department to show us the end results of these traineeship programs. If, as people say, companies are reaping millions of dollars—and they talk in the millions—because they are providing the training part of the program but not worrying about the end result, then there is a difficulty.

Traineeships are a great way for the young or unskilled to gain training and 12 months employment. However, there are alarm bells. Trainees who have completed their traineeship but whose employers choose to terminate their employment are in real trouble. School-based and full-time traineeships are a great initiative for young people, and I commend the minister for what is being done in this area. A program allowing students to join the work force one day a week is excellent. We should be pushing more and more schools to become more vocationally oriented rather than academically oriented, which was the situation 10 or 15 years ago.

I will make a quick comment about Lang Park. I believe that this government is going to fall into a great lot of trouble if it continues to ensure that the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Works Committee do not investigate this project. It is ridiculous. I see the former chairman of the Public Works Committee sitting at the back of the chamber. It is ridiculous for members of the Public Works Committee to go up and look at the Normanton Bridge, which was built a long time ago, when there are projects such as Lang Park and the footbridge which this Public Works Committee does not investigate. Neither the Public Works Committee nor the Public Accounts Committee is going to investigate.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr LINGARD: The Treasurer just wants me to say something so the parliament can refer me to the ethics committee again in order to keep me quiet. I have no doubt that the ethics committee—
Time expired.
