



Speech by

Hon. K. LINGARD

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

Hansard 11 September 2001

STATE PATROL TRAFFIC DIVISION

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (12.01 p.m.): It is disappointing that two weeks after notifying four ministers of a very serious problem in employment and training I have not received an answer from two of those ministers. In relation to the two from whom I did receive an answer, one said that it was not his but someone else's responsibility while the Minister for Fair Trading said that she would look into the problem. This is a very serious problem which I brought up in a question this morning. Let me outline to members exactly what has happened. In July Mission Employment, a training organisation in the Beaudesert area, received a phone call from the director of a company called State Patrol Traffic Division stating that it was looking for a number of people to undertake traffic control work within the Beaudesert shire. Mission Employment did its job and sought long-term unemployed people who wanted to undertake this type of work. These people were set up as traffic controllers operating the stop and go signs on roadwork sites around the shire.

When training and employment groups conduct these sorts of conferences—in this particular case, 20 people attended—\$180 per person is paid by the government. In this case, the money came from federal money. It spent \$3,600 for a supposedly three-hour session, which ended up going for only 40 minutes. Because many people did not have transport, only six were selected. Later, five or six other people went to Nerang and the same organisation conducted other conferences at \$180 per person. All was going well until payday came for the first six people. State Patrol Traffic Division said that it was having difficulty in setting up its electronic pay system through some banking institutions. It was arranged for the employees to be paid by cheque, which was fine. However, the first cheque bounced, as did the next cheque. By this stage, about six weeks of work had been completed which my constituents had not been paid for.

Further investigations reveal that one of the managers of the company is currently serving time in a Queensland prison. That in itself is extraordinary. But what is even more extraordinary is the fact that the manager held a teleconference from inside the prison to all of the staff working for the company. One person states that he was threatened with violence during this teleconference when he voiced his concerns about not getting paid. This is of grave concern to me and is simply not good enough. It is hard to understand how this could ever have happened. Someone inside the prison would have had to have set this up. Aside from that, my constituents are in dire straits. They received no money for six weeks of work and cannot claim benefits from Centrelink because they had already filled out the fortnightly forms stating that they had undertaken paid work.

Although I am appalled that a company could neglect to pay its employees, the more important issue here is why such a company is still breaking the law. I would have thought that, after notifying four ministers when parliament was not sitting—because parliament has not sat for five weeks—at least one would have been able to do something, because they received more specific details in relation to these teleconferences and phone calls than I have mentioned in this parliament. The name of the person in jail was given to those ministers, but I have not used that person's name in this parliament. That would not be fair, but it certainly would be fair to my constituents if ministers did their job. I have asked for conferences from the Minister for Employment, Training and Youth so he can tell us what is going on with these training programs.

During the estimates process the Employment Minister said that 10,500 positions have been put in place, yet 5,200 have pulled out. Something is going wrong. As happened today, the minister stands up and says that we have systems in place. The last time he stood up and spoke on this issue

he talked about an ombudsman in the training and employment area to look at all of these problems. However, I wrote a letter to the minister and two weeks later I have not even received an acknowledgment of that letter. Two weeks later nothing is being done while this company at Nerang is still employing people. The manager, who puts his name to the company, is in jail and is running teleconferences in jail. I do not know whether he received any money, but someone received the money for running these conferences at \$180 per person. As I said, 20 people attended the first conference. That amounts to \$3,600.

Time expired.
