



Speech by

GEOFF WILSON

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EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (12.25 p.m.): The Howard government and the Queensland coalition parties have a disgraceful record on employment and training. Jobs, jobs, jobs and more jobs has been a central policy objective of the Beattie Labor government since our first election in 1998. It has been so central that we established an employment and training portfolio with a dedicated responsible minister. In contrast, the National and Liberal Parties—even after five years—still reject the absolute need for an employment and training portfolio. The benefits of the Beattie government's approach can be seen from the groundbreaking training and employment program, Breaking the Unemployment Cycle. In contrast, when the Liberal and National Party coalition was last in government—as I said, only five years ago—it set out to dismantle the Goss government's labour market programs designed to get people, especially young and mature aged people, trained and into jobs. In doing so, it was following the free market ideology of the Howard federal government.

When one looks at the success of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative, one does not have to go much further than the electorate of Ferny Grove. From 1998 to 2003 through 10 different programs running on the north side of Brisbane, over 537 people have been assisted with training, over 468 have obtained jobs and funding for these programs of approximately \$2.7 million was provided. Employment and training requires a whole-of-government and a whole-of-community approach. Accordingly, in the Beattie government's first term we established the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund funded by 0.05 per cent or a quarter of the portable long service leave levy. This fund, with the joint support of employers and unions, is doing a very good job. The non-completion rate is down to a mere 10 per cent. Congratulations to the fund directors and to manager Greg Shannon.

Another initiative that deserves recognition is the CFMEU apprenticeship scheme. Set up by the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union Construction Division about seven years ago, it receives funding assistance from the Queensland Construction Training Fund set up in 1991, a fund not to be confused with the fund associated with the portable long service leave levy. The QCTF is a joint venture of building industry employers and unions. This fund is the private sector training arm of the Building Employees Redundancy Trust, itself a joint employer/union body of some 15 years standing. The BERT scheme usually invests about \$1 million per annum into training building industry apprentices through a range of programs. Having been involved with the BERT scheme some years ago myself in a former role as a CFMEU official, I know how successful both the scheme and its QCTF training arm have been.

Let us take the CFMEU apprenticeship scholarship as one example. The scholarship has created 115 extra apprenticeships in the Queensland building industry. Over 50 of that number have completed their time and received their trade qualifications. Over 10 of those 50 graduates are working as foremen and leading hands, swelling the ranks of the industry leaders of the future. I understand that in seven years of the scholarship operating approximately \$140,000 has been provided to employers in annual subsidies. So successful has been the scholarship that the rate of non-completion is well under 10 per cent. This contrasts starkly with about 40 per cent to 50 per cent of the cancellation rate of apprentices across all industries.

The QCTF directors and the CFMEU are to be commended for running a highly successful program. It is so successful that in 2003, when funds for training have been low due to the 2002 fall in the stock market, several employers have approached the CFMEU for apprentices on the basis that

they would forgo the employer subsidy. It is things like the selection process, the case management, the administrative assistance and the pivotal role of the coordinator, Rob Cameron, and training officer, Jason Stein, that employers value and want to continue. With such widespread employer support and participation in the CFMEU apprenticeship scholarship and its enormous success, one has to wonder why the \$60 million Cole royal commission and the Howard federal government has attacked the BERT scheme and the scholarship and wants to shut it down.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that the attack is driven by the federal government's blind ideological opposition to the CFMEU and anything or anyone associated with it. I am sure the union and the Queensland building industry's employers alike will rally to defend the BERT scheme and the scholarship. I hope the Howard government, under its new IR minister, comes to its senses and restores the hopes of young apprentices and future apprentices in the Queensland building industry.

Time expired.