Date: 22/08/95  Question No:

Question: Alice Springs to Darwin Railway

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Member: Mr ADAMSON
To: MINISTER for the RAILWAY

Status: Questions

Information:
In light of last night's expression of support from the Australasian Railway Association for the Darwin to Alice Springs railway, does the minister believe the railway is closer now to being constructed than it ever has been? Does he believe the Territory will enjoy enormous benefits from the railway?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, it was heartening indeed to see the president of the Australasian Railway Association support the railway as he did. Members will have seen that on ABC television news last night. A very significant railway conference is being held in Brisbane with over 1000 delegates in attendance. To receive the kind of support that the Alice Springs to Darwin rail link received from Mr Dunning yesterday was encouraging. The link was spoken about in glowing terms at an international forum which included representatives from about 7 Asian countries that we deal with and that are in our immediate proximity. That is heartening indeed.

It was a little disappointing that AusRAIL was opened by none other than the Premier of Queensland, Hon Wayne Goss. Members would be aware that the only state to rubbish the Committee on Darwin's recommendation on the railway was Queensland. It said that it should never be built. Premier Goss spoke about the importance of AusRAIL in dealing with Asia and our near neighbours in Asia. For the benefit of members, I table the AusRAIL catalogue and exhibition program.

We would like to have taken our map to the AusRAIL conference, where we were represented by Otto Alder. He did an excellent job of drumming up support for the railway in South Australia at the last federal election, in 1993. What Premier Goss does not know is the reality of geography. In fact, it is only 400 km further from Darwin to Singapore than it is from Darwin to Brisbane. If he is talking about close proximity to Asia, one can only wonder about his arithmetic. I know he does not have to worry too much now because he has only to count to one. If he loses the one, he is in a fair amount of trouble. As Mr Dunning pointed out, in the light of shipping congestion problems in the eastern ports, the landbridge has a real chance. He went on to say: 'Shipping lanes, I understand, are fairly congested now, and this would allow ships to come to Australia, perhaps to one port of entry, Darwin'. That is what we have been talking about.

Another man who will be talking at the conference today is Phil Ruthven. He is the chairman of IBIS, an international think-tank. I am told that he is a strong advocate of northern development. He is a lecturer at the Australian University of Management. Larry Bannister, who provides the secretariat for the Railway Executive Group, has written to him and he is very supportive of northern development. With the support of such august bodies as the Australasian Railway Association and people of the ilk of Mr Ruthven, we have progressed another millimetre in terms of pushing this railway forward. It will be a long hard struggle. Nobody said it would be easy otherwise it would have been built a decade or perhaps even 100 years ago. I welcome the support. I look forward to Mr Otto Alder's report, a copy of which I will make available to all members for their information.

Page 783