Questions - Tuesday 19 November 1985

Alice Springs to Darwin Railway
Mr BELL to CHIEF MINISTER

I would like to preface my question by saying, firstly, that the Chief Minister should be in no doubt about the opposition's support for the Alice Springs to Darwin railway and, secondly ...

Page 334

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE - Tuesday 19 November 1985

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Would the honourable member ask his question?

Mr BELL: Will he give an undertaking that there will be no Northern Territory government guarantees for a private railway?

ANSWER

I have outlined the statement I will make tomorrow and the government's position. It is my view that the proposed operation should be funded, operated and constructed privately. A range of options are canvassed in the statement as to whether it is prudent and wise for the government to be involved at all and, if at all, in what way. We should embark on this project from day 1 with the objective of having government backup and support. That is pretty simple. We may well get down the track and need to make a decision as to whether the government should be involved. That is very simple.

In terms of briefing members of the opposition in respect of the pipeline project, I was quite happy to make them aware of the details as the exercise progressed so that they could understand the complexity involved. It is not just a 2 plus 2 equals 4 scenario. If the opposition is prepared to play a very productive and positive role in the whole thing, I will be happy to involve it from day 1.

Mr Smith: You could have given us the Canadian Pacific report a few months ago.

Mr TUXWORTH: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition suggests I should have given the opposition the Canadian Pacific report a couple of months ago. As is its wont, it is inclined to jump in tipping buckets on everything before it has even been considered. The point that I am making now is that it should read the report, look at the banking assessments and consider the options that we have outlined. Then we can progress the development of the economics like rational people instead of conducting a political argle-bargle in the press that does not really do much credit either to the ALP or to the future of the project.

All I say to the opposition is that the role that it wants to play will be very important, whether it is positive or negative. If it plays the same sort of role it played in relation to the pipeline, that would be fantastic. After it saw the figures on the pipeline and realised the folly of its original remarks, it really came on side and it was good all the way. It was fantastic. The only mug in the whole exercise was Senator Walsh. Even the opposition would admit that. We are now going through a phase of developing a project that has never been undertaken in Australia before. It is possible. It can be done with a little working cooperation. I invite the members opposite to take that role.