QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE - Wednesday 20 November 1985

Alice Springs to Darwin Railway
Mr SMITH to CHIEF MINISTER

On a number of occasions, the Chief Minister has stressed the need for bipartisan support for the railway project, particularly the current railway project. In the light of this sentiment, what are the contents of an agreement that apparently exists between himself and the Leader of the Opposition in South Australia, an agreement which is the subject of a press conference now being held by the South Australian Leader of the Opposition? Secondly, have similar discussions been held and a similar agreement reached with the Labor government of South Australia?

ANSWER

I am delighted to be able to say to members of the Labor Party opposite and throughout Australia that we are most keen to see a bipartisan approach to the development and construction of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway. I have always been of that mind, and I even thought it was possible when the Prime Minister made a promise in 1983 that he would build the railway. I even thought it was possible when he made an offer to go 60:40 with the Northern Territory and build the railway late in 1983 or 1984. Even after it said it would never have anything to do with it, I still maintained hope that maybe one day the ALP would weigh in and give support to this project, and I still have hope.

In relation to the communications that I have had with the Premier of South Australia and the Leader of the Opposition in South Australia, I am quite happy to say that I have been approached by the Premier of South Australia who wrote to me and said he is still very supportive of the project and asked us to keep him briefed. I wrote back and said: 'Thank you for your support but, regrettably, you have the problem that you have to do what you are told by Canberra like the rest of them'. The ALP in Australia do what they are told by Canberra or get chucked off the national executive, have their budget cut or whatever. I wrote back a very polite letter to the Premier:

'I am grateful for your moral support. I know that you cannot do anything else because, if you stand up publicly and support it, you will probably have your brains kicked in by your mates in Canberra. I appreciate that you cannot do anything, and I do not expect that much is likely to happen from other members of the Labor Party'.

I am really looking forward to the 5 to 10-year time frame. I have briefed the Leader of the Opposition in South Australia and the opposition in the federal parliament on what the Territory is proposing to do. At least we know where our friends are and from where our help is likely to come when there is a change of government. If there is no change of government, we know what we will get - that is pretty obvious to everybody.

Mr Smith: Mr Bannon has been one of your biggest supporters on this.

Mr TUXWORTH: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition says that Mr Bannon has been one of the biggest supporters we have ever had on the project. He might like to tell us at some time what has ever been said or done by the Labor Party in South Australia to advance the project one inch. We have fought tenaciously with it for years to have the South road completed. What are the chances of getting it involved in the completion of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway when it is not even on its side of the border? It is no good the Premier of South Australia walking around saying that railways
are great and they support it. That will not get the railway. We need tangible support in terms of money, railway sleepers and freight commitment.

There is one thing that you can rely on from people like John Olsen and John Howard: if they say they will support it, they will. If John Olsen says he will support it, he will not be put off by the fact that some people in Canberra tell him he cannot have it or that it will not work. He has the tenacity to proceed with it. I have not closed off any options so far as John Olsen or John Bannon is concerned. If John Bannon wants to support the railway, he is in government and he has the capacity to support it...

Mr Smith: That is what he has been doing.

Mr TUXWORTH: Oh, baloney! What has he ever done? The Premier of South Australia has walked around mouthing motherhood statements and has never done a thing. I am interested in attracting the support of every politician in Australia and I know that some of them will not even give us a hearing. We will not be put off by that. We will have the railway in place just as the pipeline is in place. I expect that we will have people standing on us from one end of the country to the other. That will not stop us either. If I can solicit some support from the Liberal Party in South Australia, in any other state or federally, I will go out and solicit it because we need all the friends we can get whether they are in opposition or government. It is no good having a friend in government in South Australia if he is not prepared to do anything. It is no good talking about it.