Date : 21/02/2001 Question No :

Question : AustralAsia Railway - Extra Funding

Question Date : 21/02/2001
Member : Mr ELFERINK
To : CHIEF MINISTER

Status : Questions

Information :
I know that the Territory's representative in the House of Representatives had welcomed the comments on the extra money from the Prime Minister in relation to the railway project. What is the Chief Minister's response to that?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, my response to Mr Warren Snowdon, the Labor Party's representative in the Northern Territory, is that he demonstrates the same hypocrisy as the Leader of the Opposition demonstrated in this House yesterday when she said the Labor Party supports the additional funding for the railway. The Labor Party does not support the additional funding for the railway, the Labor Party has never supported the additional funding for the railway.

The Leader of the Opposition is on the record of opposing any increase in funding from the Northern Territory government for that railway. So it is total hypocrisy for the Leader of the Opposition to come into this House and suggest in a question that the Labor Party supports the additional funding. Equally hypocritical is Snowdon's response that he also welcomes the additional funding, because one only has to go back to a 8DDD interview on 13 February where Warren Snowdon, when asked about additional money, said to the presenter: 'I don't know how anybody would expect me or anyone else including yourself, if we had to give an undertaking about anything in terms of additional resources. Look, sight unseen Fred, why would I commit any additional resources to the railway'. Snowdon goes on, 'I am certainly not prepared to buy a pig-in-a-poke'. Now, if there was a pig-in-a-poke last week, the same pig-in-a-poke is here today. There has been no more information given to Snowdon. If there was a pig-in-a-poke last week and he wouldn't buy a pig-in-a-poke how can he come out today and say he welcomes the additional funding? He doesn't welcome it. He is bloody annoyed by it. The same as the Leader of the Opposition is annoyed by it.

The chance of this project ever getting up is a real annoyance to the Leader of the Opposition and her federal colleagues. You knock every development. Let's understand this funding. It is not additional funding. It is the possibility of additional funding. It is not an additional grant or anything like that, it's a letter of credit. It is a letter of assurance by the governments to the consortium if that money is required. Now that money may be required, the first tranche of that money may be required as a commercial loan in about 12 to 18 months time, and the undertaking by the governments is to provide that money if it is required. Of course, the governments will pursue the strategy of either seeking a private investor or on-selling that to a private investor if that opportunity presents itself.

When it comes to the attitude of Mr Snowdon, the thing that really surprises me is the way that Snowdon, who represents a large Aboriginal constituency, would sell them out so quickly, because the Central Land Council and the Northern Land Council are deeply involved in this project. One only has to see the news reports, 'Northern Territory Land Council sign up to rail deal'. There is a news report here about the Northern Central Land Councils and various Aboriginal organisations in the Northern Territory are working with the Alice to Darwin railway consortium to maximise employment opportunities for Aboriginal people along the track. We have provided money, in conjunction with the Office of Aboriginal Development and the Department of Industries and Business and the Office of Youth Affairs, to the Northern Land Council to the amounts of $82 000, to the Central Land Council of $73 000, to employ railway project officers to maximise employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal businesses in the railway. There's about 20% of contracts and opportunities available and targeted for Aboriginal people with this railway project. I know how eagerly anticipated the project is by Aboriginal people as well it is by
many businesses throughout the Northern Territory. The Tangentyere, Julalikari and Jawoyn are doing everything they can to maximise their options and interests to get involved in this project. What does their representative do? What's the man who is their spokesman, not only in the Northern Territory, listen, he is supposed to be representing these people.

This is the man who is supposed to be their advocate. This is the man who leads the charge on their interests in the federal arena and also in the Northern Territory because the leader here is irrelevant and he takes no notice of her. What does he say? I'm not prepared to buy a pig-in-a-poke. That's what you get out of Snowdon. 'Not a dollar more', said Snowdon last week, and what does he say today, he welcomes the additional funds. Total hypocrisy by a Labor government in trying to say on the one hand they support the railway and take up every opportunity to undermine it when they get the opportunity.