



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard 25 August 1998

MEMBERS FOR KEDRON, BUNDAMBA, IPSWICH, CHATSWORTH AND MURRUMBA

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services) (6.46 p.m.): The motion before us tonight makes a series of very serious allegations—serious allegations against five of my colleagues, serious allegations that do not bring forward one shred of evidence against these colleagues. It is time, as the Deputy Premier said, to call a spade a spade. This has not been debated on the facts; this is nothing more than a complicated, convoluted conspiracy theory—a totally mad conspiracy theory. Far be it for me to ruin their grand conspiracy theory with some facts, but I feel I am bound to put them on the record here tonight.

Fact No. 1 is that the Heiner inquiry was falsely established by a former National Party Government. This is a fact about which there is no dispute. Nobody here tonight has disputed this, yet in the nine years that this saga has gone on and on we have never had any serious questioning of the way in which this inquiry was set up and why it was set up in such a false and flawed fashion.

Fact No. 2. is that Mr Heiner himself sought the end of his inquiry in a letter in which he said, "In view of the confusion which exists and my doubt as to the validity of my actions so far, I am not prepared to continue any further with my inquiry."

Fact No. 3 is that there is no motive for the charges that are being made against the former Goss Cabinet. What possible motive could the early Goss Cabinet have had for protecting either activities at the John Oxley Youth Centre when it was not in Government or a decision of the previous Cabinet? What possible motive could the Goss Cabinet have had for protecting the former National Party Government? None!

Fact No. 4 is that much of the material that has been brought forward by the architects of this conspiracy is simply wrong. During the confidence motion when this matter was raised, speakers from One Nation referred throughout to the Heiner material being required for trial or for a hearing before the courts on no fewer than nine occasions. Every time they said it, it was wrong. There was not any legal action on foot at the time of the Cabinet decision, there was never any legal action taken and there is no legal action on foot about this matter as we speak. When the member for Caboolture relied on this information on three occasions in his speech, the member for Tablelands on three occasions, the member for Ipswich West once and the member for Lockyer twice, they were wrong, wrong, wrong and wrong again.

But that has not detracted them from continuing this madness. It seems to me that, if one is going to have a conspiracy theory, one ought to do it properly. If one is going to have a conspiracy theory, one really should have a totally mad one. One should have one that is gloriously mad, one that is grandly, gloriously, barking mad—and this one bears all the hallmarks of that. Not only have members opposite come in here and made repugnant and malicious personal slurs on five Ministers, they have made false and disgraceful attacks on current and former officers of my department. We do not mind so much. We have broad shoulders. We take a lot of flak and we will take a lot more. But who else has been dragged into this barking mad conspiracy? Who else is being accused of communism, paedophilia and criminal activity? None other than the Crown law office, the Audit Office, the Office of the Information Commissioner, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Queensland Police Service, the

Criminal Justice Commission and the Federal Senate! I am disappointed here tonight. I had hoped to hear the full extent of this conspiracy.

I was hoping that we would hear tonight of the involvement of the United Nations in this matter; that we would hear tonight about the involvement of the Vatican, the Pope and the entire Catholic Church around the world; that we would know tonight at last the truth about the involvement of the ABC in this; about how Bananas in Pyjamas have figured in this, and the role of the Wiggles in this matter. But no! What we have had tonight is further nonsense about documents and documents and documents.

While we are on the subject of documents, there is a lot of curiosity from One Nation members about the attendance register from Cabinet. I am going to let the One Nation members into a secret. Just so that they never know who is there and who makes these dastardly decisions, at the end of every Labor Cabinet meeting right throughout the Goss years—and we have restored the tradition—the Premier eats the attendance register. I say to the One Nation members: you will never get it. You can take us to the International Court of Justice and the attendance register will remain in the bowels of former Labor Premiers. It is part of the austerity drive; we do not get lunch.

Dr PRENZLER (Lockyer—ONP) (6.52 p.m.): It is pretty hard to follow that, is it not? These Ministers' integrity is at stake in delivering honest Government in accordance with principles firmly established within the Westminster system and specifically adverted to in the Queensland Cabinet Handbook. In Item 10 of that handbook under the heading "Minister's Code of Ethics" a number of the paragraphs necessitate attention to the legal and conventional rights and obligations attaching to the five Ministers of the Cabinet responsible for the Heiner inquiry now known as Shreddergate.

Paragraphs of particular application are noted beneath the introductory provisions. Given the wide discretionary powers of Ministers, high standards are required of them in the execution of their public duties. Therefore, Ministers will—

"Accept that it is a matter of discretion for the Premier as to whether a Minister should stand down if the Minister in question is the subject of an official investigation into a matter of serious impropriety or alleged behaviour of a serious nature. The exercise of the Premier's discretion will be informed by the nature of the investigation in question. Ministers accept that they should stand down if they are charged with such an offence, and should resign if convicted."

And further—

"Act in conformity with the principles of responsible Government and Cabinet conventions laid down in this Handbook. In particular, Ministers acknowledge that the collective decisions of Cabinet are binding on them individually and that if a Minister is unable to publicly support a Cabinet decision, the proper course is to resign from the Cabinet. Ministers note the understanding that Cabinet proceedings are confidential and that details of a submission should not be announced before its consideration by Cabinet, unless with the consent of the Premier."

And further—

"Be aware of the constitutional responsibilities to act in the public interest and not to disclose confidential information or Government information likely to injure the public interest."

And further—

"Accept that they and their departmental public servants are bound by the caretaker convention in particular, that during the period after the dissolution of the Legislative Assembly, Ministers should not, except in cases of urgency, make any new significant appointments, enter into new contracts or undertakings that would bind an incoming Government, or embark on any new policy initiatives that would bind an incoming Government. Ministers note that breach of this convention justifies an incoming Government reviewing such appointments, contracts or initiatives."

How can Mr Beattie's non-majority and the conditional support of the member for Nicklin provide stable Government, which the Governor must determine is available, when five members who are Ministers are under a cloud in terms of a Government appointed inquiry? As asserted by Crown law, the inquiry was apparently shelved in the public interest, notwithstanding the fact that the report in toto was undertaken in that very same public interest. The conclusions of that inquiry relating to obscene child abuse ultimately went to the root of decent behaviour in a civilised society. The inquiry's conclusions surely ought to be in the hands of those who are proven to be dedicated to the care and protection of the whole electorate, including, of course, our children.

I call on all members of this House to support this motion as this issue involving the expulsion of the five Ministers is the root of maintaining the integrity of this House. Apart from calling upon the members of this House to support this motion, I also call upon them to put aside their party affiliations

for they must surely be here in this House to firstly represent the people of this great State. The people of this great State deserve to see this House acting as an example of honesty and integrity and not simply a place in which to use numbers to protect one's mates.
