



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard 27 August 1998

FORDE INQUIRY; MR H. HEILPERN

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services) (6.15 p.m.): As I said earlier today, the allegations that have been raised thus far are serious. My response to them has been to examine them as thoroughly as possible. I have in each case found them to be baseless and without foundation. I have invited the entire House to provide any additional evidence or any other concerns. I extended that invitation to the whole of the Parliament yesterday and received nothing from any member of the House. This morning I invited the Leader of the Opposition to provide to me in writing by early this afternoon any material that he thought I should consider prior to this evening's motion. I received no further material, but he did respond and say that he would be raising matters this evening. I look forward to hearing them and I can assure him that I will examine them in due course.

The only new matter that has been brought forward for our consideration is that raised this morning about so-called "attributed comments" to Mr Heilpern. The Leader of the Opposition would not reveal the source for his comments this morning. That is little wonder, for once again we find that it is none other than the Sunday Telegraph. As usual, we heard a half-truth from the Leader of the Opposition in that he quoted the comments out of context. I am happy now to put the comments into their full context, which is as follows—

"Welfare has changed dramatically as society has changed—10 years ago YACS officers didn't need to exercise that sort of discretion and make the hard decisions they do today.

'I can't tell my officers exactly when to intervene; they've got to use their discretion.

'We've got to make sure that intervention is not more harmful than the situation that we're saving that person from. We've got to look for the unintended consequences.

'I think it's damaging when people get the image that people who assault their children are some sort of monsters.' "

That comment bears remarkable and striking similarities to comments in a letter to today's Courier-Mail from Dr Richard Roylance, the president of the Protect All Children Society Today and a very well respected paediatrician in this State. He states—

"In short, do children require guidance and discipline? Absolutely. Do parents sometimes run out of options and hit their children? Yes.

Do parents feel good about those moments when they hit? No ...

Does the community have an obligation to provide parents who are at the end of their tether with appropriate support, from the simple gift of neighbourly help ... to government-funded formal programmes ... Yes.

Should all lapses by parents in this area be dealt with criminally? No, of course, not."

Will the Opposition now embark on a campaign to smear the good name and reputation of this highly reputable man, who is well known and highly regarded for his skill and commitment to fighting child abuse?

The member for Indooroopilly said that the previous Government had a rigorous record in relation to combating child abuse. The member for Moggill claimed that victims needed to be heard. Why did he not give them the opportunity to be heard in the two and a half years when he was in Government? What is the record of the Opposition on this matter?

When shocking revelations at the Wood inquiry became public in 1996, what was the response of the Labor Party? The member for Capalaba, now Deputy Premier, moved to immediately establish an independent authority to fully investigate accusations of paedophilia in this State. The motion was seconded by the member for Mount Gravatt. The coalition opposed the motion. At the time, the member for Indooroopilly argued against the inquiry on the basis that the CJC might get its nose out of joint. The motion was successful due only to the support of the member for Gladstone. However, it was opposed by every member of the then Liberal/National Party Government.

On 21 August 1997, the Leader of the Opposition and now Premier moved to, among other things, establish a commission of inquiry to investigate thoroughly the incidence of paedophilia and report to the Parliament. Again, the Liberal/National coalition opposed the motion. The member for Indooroopilly said that these victims deserve better. I say to him that they are getting better. They are getting from this Government the fully and properly constituted commission of inquiry that he never gave them.

In conclusion, let me say that, in relation to the serious matters that I brought to the Parliament this morning in relation to the possible misconduct of an officer of the Children's Commission, I have received a response from the Children's Commission, and I table the documents in that regard. The response confirms that the officer concerned did, in fact, contact a member of the Neerkol action group in relation to a demonstration. I have sought Crown law advice as to my further actions in this regard.

Let me conclude by saying that nothing will stand in the way of this inquiry—not the grubby and dirty attacks of the member for Indooroopilly or the member for Surfers Paradise; not the demonstrations by One Nation candidates outside the Children's Commission; and not the actions of those with base, vested interests to protect anybody either in my department, the Children's Commission or any other public or private body in this State.

Time expired.
