



Speech by

Hon. J. FOURAS

MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE

Hansard 16 September 1998

MR SPEAKER'S RULING

Motion of Dissent

Hon. J. FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (9.14 p.m.): I am pleased to join in this debate. In moving this dissent motion, the Leader of the Opposition argued that he was exercising his right to dissent from a ruling and that he was not expressing a lack of confidence in Mr Speaker. He went on to stress that he had not intended in any way to be critical of Mr Speaker. However, he then went on to say that an error of judgment was the issue. What absolute nonsense!

Having heard today a statement from Mr Speaker indicating his interpretation of Standing Orders 119 and 120, I would have thought that a decent Opposition Leader would have withdrawn the motion. The Opposition did not have to persist with the motion because, clearly, we had a clarification as to how Standing Orders 119 and 120 were going to be used in the light of rulings given by various Speakers in the history of this Parliament. Today, nobody disagreed with Mr Speaker's ruling.

This exercise is nothing more than a media stunt. It is nothing more than an attempt by the Leader of the Opposition to attract the media's attention and to get some mileage out of it. When I visited the House of Commons, I was told that members of Parliament never, ever thought about dissenting from Mr Speaker's rulings. The members said to me, "Even if he was wrong, Mr Speaker must have had a reason for doing so."

The Leader of the Opposition said that Mr Speaker made an error in judgment as to whether the Premier pointed there or whether he pointed there. What a joke! I refer to what happened when I was the Speaker. The Opposition moved dissent motion after dissent motion when I was Speaker. Those motions were always media driven, or driven to indicate that the then Opposition was not receiving a fair go. I found eight such motions in Hansard. One was about whether I called the Liberal Party second or the Deputy Leader of the Opposition second. That was a dissent motion! What a joke!

The second one was in relation to Standing Order 68, which states that a member can ask a question of a chairman—and in this case the chairman was the chairman of the PCJC—as to whether he is going to look into a matter or if he is going to report on a matter. The Opposition wanted to interpret that Standing Order to mean that it could ask questions about the CJC. What a joke!

The third one was when the Opposition attempted to deny Mr Wells, the then Attorney-General, the right to make a statement in the House about why the special prosecutor was not going to continue with the Joh case. Again, the Opposition tried to abuse the parliamentary process. Because some members of the Opposition were then expelled from the House, the Opposition moved another dissent motion.

The fourth one was that second-reading debates should not be relevant. The Opposition actually argued in this House that we should have debates about Bills, but that they do not have to be relevant!

The fifth one was a motion to support the editing out by Table Office staff of offensive language in a motion moved by the member for Southport. I did not do it; the Table Office edited the language from the motion because it was offensive. The Opposition then moved a dissent motion from my ruling because I was censuring the Parliament!

The sixth motion of dissent related to an objection to ruling out of order questions related to a Bill currently before the House. Since the term of this Government, every day in this Chamber Mr Borbidge has been rising to say, "Mr Speaker, that matter is before the House, the member cannot talk about it." Yet the Leader of the Opposition moved a dissent motion because I made such a ruling!

The seventh dissent motion related to me, as Speaker, not paying due regard to Standing Order 70. This is beautiful one. Standing Order 70 states that, in answer to a question, Ministers should not debate the matter and their answers should be relevant and concise. How many times did Government members, when they were in Opposition, say, "Mr Speaker, I refer to Standing Order 70. The Minister is going on for hours."? If the members of the Opposition looked at the statistics, they would realise that, when they were in Government, Ministers took much longer to answer questions than the Ministers of this Government ever have. Yet, when Labor was in Opposition did it ever move a dissent motion against Speaker Turner's ruling? Never! Yet the Opposition moved a dissent motion against my ruling, stating that I was not adhering to Standing Order 70!

The eighth dissent motion refers to the tabling of the Heiner documents. Minister Warner had referred to something from the Heiner documents. She did not have them with her. However, the Opposition said that she should table them. The documents had to be in her hands. Clearly, I am saying that this mob opposite use——

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The "Opposition parties".

Mr FOURAS: The Opposition parties use dissent motions as media stunts and to score political points. They are not interested in the dignity and integrity of this Parliament. They are not interested at all in helping us run a better Parliament. They are interested only in getting some mileage out of dissent motions.

The Leader of the Opposition said that he did not want to criticise Mr Speaker, but then he went on to speak about an error in judgment. The Leader of the Opposition says that he wants this Parliament to function properly, but he is a hypocrite. The Leader of the Opposition should ask himself why he persisted with this motion after the statement made today by Speaker Hollis. Clearly, Speaker Hollis said how we could govern with Standing Orders 119 and 120. There is no argument about that. He referred to precedents and he gave perfect rulings. Now what do we have? We have this mob over here wanting to play politics with the Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The "Opposition parties".

Mr JOHNSON: I rise to a point of order. Mr Speaker, we have been listening all day to your ruling. If the honourable member for Ashgrove is referring to us, he is going against your ruling. I ask him to withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER: I was just in the process of asking the member for Ashgrove again to refer properly to the people opposite as "members of the Opposition parties".

Mr FOURAS: I am pleased to adhere to your ruling, Mr Speaker, and I apologise. I have no problem with that at all.
