



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 27 August 1998

FORDE INQUIRY; MR H. HEILPERN

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt— ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading) (6.37 p.m.): Yesterday the Leader of the Liberal Party raised damaging allegations concerning the appointment of Mr Hans Heilpern to the position of general manager of the Building Services Authority. Today those allegations were repeated by the member for Indooroopilly. I would like to place on record that I have had no personal dealings with Mr Heilpern.

Let us look at the allegations. The honourable member for Moggill stated that Mr Heilpern managed the BSA at a time when it was wracked with claims of harassment, physical assault and the suggestion that Mr Heilpern obtained his job only because he was faxed the questions for the interview. The implication was that Mr Heilpern was responsible for or involved in criminal activity. Let us face it: physical assault and harassment are crimes in this State.

After having my office conduct some investigations in this regard, I can inform the Parliament that this was not the case. Mr Heilpern was appointed to act as general manager of the BSA in late 1992. I am aware that there were a number of allegations of scurrilous activity occurring within the BSA in the early 1990s. These allegations relate to a period prior to the appointment of Mr Heilpern to the BSA and, I understand, relate largely to a previous general manager.

In regard to Mr Heilpern's appointment and the grounds on which this occurred, I have been advised that no questions asked during an interview for his position were supplied to Mr Heilpern prior to his interview. I can say that with absolute confidence because, from what I have been advised, Mr Heilpern was not interviewed for this position. He was selected to immediately go into the BSA in a caretaker capacity for a limited period in order to rectify some of the problems that occurred under the previous general manager and because of the sudden departure of the previous general manager. The Opposition has got the wrong man.

Former Deputy Premier Tom Burns was the relevant Minister and he approved the short-term appointment of Mr Heilpern. Mr Heilpern simply acted in the position at the BSA for a period of six months and was asked to continue for another period of six months whilst the position of general manager was publicly advertised for filling. It is my understanding that Mr Heilpern did not apply for this position and, instead, having done his job in rectifying some of the problems, went on to pursue his career in an area outside the BSA.

As I said yesterday, the accusation made by the Leader of the Liberal Party was a disgraceful smear on the character of Mr Heilpern. As a former Minister with responsibility for the BSA, the member for Moggill should have known better. I suspect that he knows as little about the history of the BSA as he does about the financial viability of the BSA.

If the Leader of the Liberal Party thinks that Mr Heilpern is unfit to assist the inquiry because of his BSA performance, then he should withdraw his concerns. To continue them in the face of the evidence presented to him today is truly disgraceful. Opposition members are looking increasingly as desperate people, attempting to gain political points on the back of the reputation of a decent man. For two days now they have used this House as a cowards' castle to attack the reputation of a respected public servant in order to destroy the inquiry. From all my reports, Mr Heilpern served admirably as the general manager of the BSA, and members opposite should not be saying otherwise.
