



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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PUBLIC SERVICE AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (3.19 p.m.): Interestingly, this is the first private member's Bill to be debated. The only reason we are doing so is that the Premier was forced to allow private member's Bills to be debated, because he is clinging to minority Government by his fingernails. The Premier said that this is an historic moment. However, those of us who have been in Opposition before would remember the six years of the previous Labor Government, when it did not matter how many private members' Bills or Notices of Motion we brought in—

Ms Spence: I don't think that's true. We did allow some.

Mr HORAN: The only private member's Bill that that Government ever allowed to be debated was that from the honourable member for Yeronga. It never allowed any of ours. That just goes to show how politically motivated this Government is. This debate is just a means of survival in that this was one of the inducements offered to the member for Nicklin to gain his support. It is just about politics. This was forced on the Government. There is no way in the wide world that if this Government had a majority and not a minority we would be debating this Bill today.

The Premier has said much about this being a politically motivated stunt. He does not like our argument that this is about accountability and the use of taxpayers' money. The Premier would like to think that if his Government appointed someone who turned out to be less than successful or a failure and this minority Government did not last any longer than six months, a year or 18 months—or even if it went its term of three years—that person would still be paid out hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars. We are dealing with a minority Government that for a number of reasons could fall at any time. We know that that is the case; we were a minority Government for almost two and a quarter years. However, we survived those two and a quarter years and did a great job for the State.

The central issue in this debate is the accountability and honesty of this Government with respect to its employment arrangements for the highest paid chief executive officers who manage and run our departments—some 18 of them. For example, if this minority Government were to fall at Christmas time, we would be looking at some four and a half years of payments. In relation to the average changeover rate of CEOs, the Premier spoke about keeping on a third of CEOs or directors-general. We could face a payout figure of anywhere in the order of \$2.5m per year for four and a half years—\$10m or \$12m. That \$10m or \$12m, at about 20 or 30 employees per million dollars, would provide hundreds of jobs. Should we not be spending taxpayers' money on providing jobs rather than paying out huge redundancy payments to those people whom the incoming Government regards as being either not up to scratch or as political appointees? The Premier has spoken a great deal about the number of directors-general he has kept on. Any sensible and smart Government would keep people on. When we came to Government in February 1996 we kept on some people.

Mr Borbidge: He talks about Rob Stable. He didn't mention the fact that he knifed Frank Peach, whom they appointed.

Mr HORAN: That is right.

If anyone should perform and show leadership that is way above the benchmark, it should be the directors-general or CEOs. Why would we want to have these people on a five-year contract when,

if they prove to be unsuccessful or political hacks, they have to be paid out for some two years of their contract? This Government made a decision on those directors-general that it wanted to keep, as we did when we came to Government. The genesis of directors-general being changed or reappointed was the Goss Government's coming to power in 1989, when we saw the disgraceful sacking of people right across-the-board. Senior public servants were placed in the Gulag at Kelvin Grove. It was like a concentration camp, with a bare desk, a wooden chair and no phone. Sometimes they were lucky even if they had a window. There was not even a pencil in the drawer. Basically, the Government tried to force them to resign so that they would not have to be paid out. That is when all this business of changing CEOs started.

However, we realise that when new Governments come in changes are made in the very important positions of directors-general. The Government of the day wants those people that it considers to be the best for the job. In some cases—and we have seen it with the Labor Government coming to power—they want to make appointments that could only be described as political. The Government may have made a judgment and felt that it did not like our directors-general because it thought they were too close to us. That is a problem that we are seeing in modern politics. The Government even sacked a director-general who had 35 years of long, loyal and outstanding service in the Public Service.

Mr Swarten: Who was he?

Mr HORAN: The Government sacked the director-general of the Department of Justice. He had a long track record of service—over 35 years. Gone! In his place the Government has appointed someone who is being flown up and down every week from Melbourne at enormous cost to the taxpayer. If the Government were to change, that person would have to be paid a redundancy for the four or five years left of the contract.

This politicisation of the Queensland Public Service all started under the Goss Labor Government, when we saw the Gulag, which was probably one of the cruellest political acts that we ever saw perpetrated on Queensland employees and the Public Service. Let us stop hearing all this talk from the Premier, with his arms akimbo, about how open and honest he is in running Government. Let us not have any more of that talk.

This debate is about the standards that we all expect from our directors-general. If that standard is not met, why should Queensland taxpayers fork out millions and millions of dollars when a minority Government changes or even if the Government goes its full term and then changes? This is about having directors-general who perform and who represent the good old-fashioned traditions of being loyal and serving the Government of the day straight down the line. If we are to adopt five-year contracts, a political appointee can think, "I'll go hell for leather for my mates. If at the end of a year the minority Government is all over, I'll be paid for four years and I can retire and go to the beach." That is an absolute waste of taxpayers' money.

When we came to power in February 1996 there were a number of political appointees and there were others who simply did not meet the standards that we as a coalition Government required. However, we handled the changes with decency and we did so within the rules. We made those changes without the threats that accompanied the Goss Government's approach when it politicised the Public Service back in 1989-90.

The breathtaking arrogance of the Beattie Labor Government has to be seen to be believed. When we were a minority Government, I remember reading in the press about our having a hit list. It went on and on. For example, if someone departed or went to New South Wales to work for the Carr Government because that was the sort of Government that he or she wanted to work for, all sorts of stories surfaced about a hit list. But what happens when the Labor Party comes to Government and there are sackings right across-the-board? It is portrayed as some beautiful, lovely, psychedelic, esoteric experience.

Mr Swarten: We didn't sack anyone. Their contracts ran out.

Mr HORAN: There was no hit list; this Government just got rid of them all.

Mr Borbidge: Why? Because they had three-year contracts, not five.

Mr Swarten: He said we sacked them.

Mr HORAN: Of course they did.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! The Minister for Public Housing!

Mr HORAN: Thank you for your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The difference between our side and the Government side is that we are about honesty, accountability and the taxpayers' money. I have spoken about the Director-General of Justice. The current director-general was signed up late in the term of the Goss Labor Government in November 1995, when the Goss Labor Government was well and truly aware of what was likely to happen in

Mundingburra. If my memory serves me right, it signed him up in great haste at the last minute before the court decision came down. Therefore, when we came to Government in February 1996 and that person was not suitable there was a massive payout. He is now back again on another five-year contract.

Mr Borbidge: They signed up Ross Rolfe on a five-year term the day before the Mundingburra by-election.

Mr HORAN: That is right. If we want an example of moral corruption, we need go no further than that. The Public Service Amendment Bill is designed to limit the appointment of Public Service chief executives to the term of a Government. Is that not fair enough? They are the highest paid people in the Public Service. Is it not fair enough that they be judged on performance? They get a good and appropriate salary whilst they are in these positions. They hold down very responsible jobs. If at the end of their time they have not performed to expectations, why should they get a taxpayer-funded basket of two, three or four years' payout?

These people should be appointed on three-year contracts. When we were in Government we appointed them to three-year contracts. They should be rewarded well—in line with the departmental budget they are responsible for, in line with the number of staff they are responsible for, and in line with the responsibilities of the department that they are there to acquit. These people certainly should not be precluded from selection for subsequent contracts. That is the point of this matter. If a director-general proves to be successful and even-handed, delivering the policies of the Government of the day in a fair, unbiased and professional way, then certainly that person should get every single consideration for reappointment. That has happened at the past two changes of Government.

The new Beattie appointments have been made without the advertisement of some positions. They have been made without a merit selection process. They have been made with significantly higher pay rates and they have been made for five-year terms—a period which exceeds the maximum possible term of this 49th Parliament by at least two years.

This is a very sensible measure of reform. It recognises the need for excellence and the need for directors-general to achieve standards and to receive renewed contracts on the basis of their achievements, success and professionalism. It recognises the mix of American and British practice that now exists in Queensland for the upper echelons of the Public Service. It deals with the reality we have had here in Queensland since the Goss Government came to power in 1989. That reality has to be worked with. It can only be of benefit.

This Public Service Amendment Bill is designed to codify that benefit and to give political direction at the very top of the Public Service so that the Government of the day can efficiently and effectively implement its policy and so that sound, non-partisan administration below that level can be in place so that Queenslanders can get the best possible service. I think it is important for the absolute professionalism, protection, loyalty and dedication of our Public Service that we have non-partisan leadership—simply driving a department for the benefit of Queenslanders, implementing the policy of the Government of the day and ensuring that the department is part of an absolutely non-political Public Service that we can all be proud of. We can then give to them in return the loyalty that they provide to the Government and to Queenslanders.

The Beattie minority Government has no mandate to consider itself as governing with a majority of 10, as we so often hear. This is a Government that secured less than 40% of the vote of Queenslanders. It is a true minority Government in every sense of the word. People did not vote for a Labor minority. They did not vote for Labor at all! Labor's New Directions statement issued on 18 April 1998 has this to say about the role of public servants—

"Labor will restore the professional career public service and will guarantee job security to public servants, other than those on short-term contracts such as those which expire on change of government."

Labor was ready to kick them out the minute there was a change in Government. It went on—

"Impartiality will be returned to the public service from the position of Deputy Director-General down."

So obviously Labor did not want to have impartiality up at the top. Premier Beattie's policy contained the threat that a Labor Government would appoint directors-general for five years, but in the Public Service magazine Sector Wide in September 1996 he said this about chief executives—

"The decision of the Borbidge Government to make CEO contracts only 'for the term of the government' is welcome.

But does it go far enough?

... such appointees should leave office immediately upon a change of government—and without a big payout from long-suffering taxpayers."

Another Beattie backflip! Mr Beattie contributed to Sector Wide in June 1998, in the midst of the election campaign. He said that he was open and accountable and told the people what his policy was so that everybody knew what he was going to an election on. In Sector Wide he says to the public servants of Queensland—

"I am committed to job stability for all Public Servants, other than those such as Directors-General on short-term contracts which expire with the Government of the day."

What did he mean? Did he mean five-year contracts or just changing directors-general with short-term contracts every time there is a change of Government?

If this is an example of the Beattie minority Labor Government's commitment to honesty and openness in public administration and Government, then the people really have been duped by the political fixers who inhabit the ALP. Today we have seen the Premier stand up and once again put on the theatrical performance, arms akimbo, and state that this is about open and accountable government. But this is about rewarding the Labor mates. This is about putting in place a system whereby if a director-general on \$200,000 a year turns out to be a failure, turns out to be the sort of director-general that Queenslanders do not want to have, there will be a massive payout of taxpayers' money to that person when this minority Government falls, or when it loses power at the end of its three-year term.

That is not what happens to ordinary people. Average people get a job; if they perform they retain that job and if they do not perform they lose the job. Why should it be any different for chief executives or directors-general on \$200,000 a year? We should have incentives for directors-general to work in Queensland and prove that they are professional so that the next Government says, "That bloke is a beauty. He was straight down the middle. He had a professional department. There was no bias of political interference in that department. It was straight down the line on policies. That is the sort of person that we want to keep." That is the standard of professionalism we should be aiming for in Queensland and that is why the passage of this amendment Bill is so important.

I appeal to all members of this Parliament, particularly the Independent members, to talk about honesty and accountability and think about the millions of dollars of payout that will be made when there is a change of Government. Just think how many jobs we could provide with that money to good, ordinary, decent Queenslanders who would be successful at their work and who are crying out for a job. This is about performance, honesty and accuracy.

The Premier made much in talking about the other States. I like to think that we in the coalition are prepared to back Queenslanders. He seems to think that Queensland has to go along with every other State in Australia, that we cannot stand on our own feet and set our own standards, that we cannot have our own honest and accountable system of government, that we have to go along with these systems whereby people who do not measure up, who do not meet the mark, win lotto and get paid out for two, three, four or five years. We want a Queensland system.

Queensland has always been a bit different. Because we had a National/Liberal coalition Government for 32 years, a tradition of sound financial management was established in Queensland. We stood alone in that regard while all the rest of the States went their own way. Honourable members saw what happened in Victoria and South Australia under Labor. They collapsed and became rust buckets. Let us have some decent Queensland legislation.

I recommend this Bill to the House. If we are to regain the respect of the people of Queensland, we have to be accountable. The average man or woman in the street does not want to see someone who has been a failure get four years' payout, at \$200,000 a year, as a hand-out from the Labor Party.
