



Speech by

PAUL LUCAS, MLA

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

Hansard 6 August 1998

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

Mr LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (6.48 p.m.): It is pretty sad for this House that we have reached the stage at which during the 6 o'clock debate all we can have in this Chamber is a debate to have a debate about Sessional Orders in the future; that we cannot have a debate about jobs and economic direction. Today in question time we saw how the Opposition is obsessed with dragging down the Chevron project, and all we are doing at 6 o'clock tonight is having a debate about a debate. That is very, very sad.

It was very interesting to listen to the history lesson from the member for Mooloolah, but perhaps it could do with a little bit more elaboration. Members in the House of Commons do allocate time for debating private members' business, but private members' business is a totally different thing from private members' Bills. The House of Commons has the ability to do things such as pass legislation with respect to the Church of England and things like that, and that is private members' business, not private members' Bills. So it is quite misleading to take the view that people can compare us with them in any way.

However, honourable members can compare us with other Parliaments. It is very interesting to note the history of private members' Bills in the Commonwealth Parliament. The member was talking about the United Australia Party. He was talking about Ben Chifley—that great Australian Prime Minister.

Mr Laming: Curtin.

Mr LUCAS: Sorry, Curtin—that great Australian Prime Minister as well. However, I have not heard too many speeches that they have given in the Federal Parliament in recent years. The fact is that private members' Bills are not debated all the time. They are debated, but they are not the ordinary course of business.

It is particularly sad when one notes that the Leader of the House informed the House that he had advised the Leader of the Opposition that this motion was to be debated in the next sitting week. It is very, very sad that we have to deal with this stunt when we could have been dealing with a motion—of course, it is the Opposition's choice of what to debate at 6 o'clock—that addressed some of the substantive issues of the day. The Opposition's priorities never cease to amaze me. It would rather have a debate about a debate than a debate about jobs, economic development or what people in Queensland think should be our future direction.

What other hypocrisy do we have to put up with from the Opposition? Let us look at how many private members' Bills the then Labor Opposition was allowed to debate when the coalition was in Government. How many? Nil, zero, squat, zip! That was how many we got to debate when the coalition was in Government. That is what it did. Opposition members can go on all they like about the 6 o'clock debate, but how long is the 6 o'clock debate? What sort of a chance would they have had to debate their business? What sort of a chance would they have had to analyse the issues in Committee?

The fact is that Opposition members are condemned by their own actions. It is not what they say here tonight on the road to Damascus. They had no intention of adopting this practice. If they were sitting on this side of the House—God help us—they would not be adopting it. The fact is that it is only due to the good offices of the Premier and the member for Nicklin who got together after the last

election result and said, "Let us have a look at how we can make this Parliament work better for the people." That is how we actually arrived at and agreed on this proposal with respect to private members' Bills.

What happens when the Opposition wants to play politics and mischief and it bowls up private member's Bill after private member's Bill after private member's Bill? Nothing will be debated in this House because we will be dealing with private members' Bills. The fact is that this place runs on the basis that the Government proposes its legislation for the Parliament to vote on. Opposition members have every opportunity to take issue with Government legislation and, indeed, have every right and opportunity to move amendments to Government legislation. If they do not like the exact thrust of the policy, they can take advantage of their opportunities in debating Government legislation to move appropriate amendments—and I am sure they will often do that, as is their right—and they will be debated in the ordinary course as Government business is dealt with.

However, the members opposite have no right to take over the control of Parliament. The Parliament deals with Government legislation as a priority because it is the Government that has a mandate to implement its legislative agenda. If members opposite do not like our legislative agenda, they should not vote for it and they can campaign against it at the next election. They campaigned against it in this election and the people of Queensland gave us the mandate to implement it. We do have an obligation to allow——

Honourable members interjected.

Mr LUCAS: I note that the members of the National Party opposite are again encouraging me to point out that 85% of Queenslanders voted against them and that 84% of Queenslanders voted against the Liberal Party, but the fact is that this is a Government with a two-party preferred majority of 54%.

Let us talk about jobs. Let us debate the real issues in this Parliament. We are not a debating society or a student union; we are not members of the Young Liberals, Young Labor or Young Nationals. What we do in this Parliament is serious stuff. If members opposite are going to abuse the process of this Parliament so they cannot debate legislation properly, that is how the people of Queensland will judge them.
