



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR LYTTON

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SENATOR M. COLSTON

Mr LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (7.05 p.m.): There will always be some debate about how much a particular member of Parliament's support comes from a personal vote and how much comes from their party endorsement. Even Independent members here are elected as such, and part of their support would come from the fact that they are independent just as much as if their particular identity would be John Smith, Independent. This, of course, is far less a factor in Upper House elections, when members of the Upper House are elected from the State at large.

In Queensland, at each Federal election, the State elects six senators by a ballot process that uses either above or below the line voting. In Senate elections this gives a true indication of the actual strength of the party vote as compared with the vote for individual senators. This is important, because we have seen, and will continue to see, a perversion of democracy in this country by the continued presence in the Senate of Senator Mal Colston.

Senator Colston was last elected to the Australian Senate for a six-year term as an Australian Labor Party senator at the 1993 Federal election. In August 1996, Senator Colston resigned from the ALP because he wanted to be Deputy President of the Senate. In a tawdry, disgusting political deal, the Liberal Party in the Australian Senate supported Senator Colston for the deputy presidency so he could get an additional \$16,000 per year in pay. I will never forget as long as I live the look on Colston's face—not unlike a rabbit caught in a spotlight—when Kerry O'Brien of the ABC said, "Most people resign from political parties on a question of principle. Senator Colston, what question of high principle did you resign on?" The truth is that he sold his soul for a lousy \$16,000 per year to become Deputy President of the Senate. He sold away 38 years of membership of Australia's oldest political party—one of its great political institutions—a party which, despite its failings, has continued to be the only political party capable of delivering a decent standard of living and real dignity to all Australians regardless of class, gender, race or creed.

Not all members of this House would realise its role in the Malcolm Colston saga. Colston was Labor's nominee in 1975 to replace deceased Senator Bert Milliner when Joh Bjelke-Petersen tore up convention and supported Albert Patrick Field. Colston was then supported by Labor in the succeeding Senate election and was elected and had Labor's support for the next 21 years. How sickening that a man, originally a victim of National/Liberal lack of principle, sold his own principles in a dirty deal with them. How ironic that, only a few months after his defection, the Liberal Party jettisoned Malcolm Colston when the stench of its dirty deal with him became so bad that he was a political liability to it. The real lesson is from time immemorial: rats, grubs and defectors get a pat on the back from the other side while they are of use to them, but as soon as they no longer matter they end up discarded, despised by all and respected by none.

An Opposition member: What about Cheryl?

Mr LUCAS: Unlike Cheryl Kernot, Colston, like Don Lane and Brian Austin, swapped sides but did not have the integrity to resign and face the people. Former senator Cheryl Kernot had that integrity. When she resigned from the Democrats to join Labor, she also immediately resigned from the Senate, thus giving the Democrats the ability to appoint her replacement, and also at the expense of her parliamentary pension. To even think of Mal Colston ever considering for one second such principle as displayed by Cheryl Kernot is laughable.

In the 1993 Queensland Senate elections, the ALP polled 729,065 votes, or 39.41%. In Senate elections, voters are given an opportunity to vote for individual senators below the line. In 1993, Colston got 1,053 votes, or 0.06% below the line. That was how much people then thought of his individual candidacy. He was elected on the basis of the Labor vote alone. Yet he now sits in the Senate on the basis of Labor voters' votes but votes to sell one third of Telstra, and no doubt will support the sale of the rest, and also a GST.

The people of Queensland have had an opportunity to adjudicate on now Independent Senator Mal Colston in the most recent October Federal election. Senator Colston himself was not a candidate, but his wife, Dawn, and son David were. So how did the bogus Colston "Queensland first" team go? In total, the team got eleven and a half thousand votes, or 0.58%. Below the line, Dawn Colston got 59 votes, or three-thousandths of a percent, and David Colston got 904 votes, or five-hundredths of a percent.

The fact is that now there can be no shadow of a doubt that Malcolm Colston has no right to claim any mandate to sit in the Federal Senate on behalf of Queenslanders. If he were to have any principles, he would resign immediately from the Senate and allow a Labor nominee to be placed in the Senate for the remainder of his term. Colston has a hide as thick as a rhinoceros. I do not expect that he is remotely interested in looking objectively at the true facts of his 1993 election and the even more compelling facts of the recent Senate vote, but I ask him to take the next few weeks before the Senate resumes to reflect on his conduct and to ask himself how he wants history to remember his contributions to Australian public life. I say to Senator Colston: try to salvage something of your self-esteem, honour and dignity by leaving the Senate now. You will never repair the damage done to your reputation among the Labor Party and, more importantly, Labor voters, but at least you might show some of us that in your total self-interested, self-absorbed avaricious self——

Time expired.
