



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (2.41 a.m.), in reply: I offer my sincere thanks to all members for their contributions to the debate on this motion. Although I did not agree with a number of the speeches nor with the tone of others, it is important that I acknowledge, I respect and I defend the right of members to express their views, and I thank them for their contributions. I will deal with a number of specific matters later.

Firstly, in relation to the amendments proposed to the original motion, we on this side of the House will oppose the amendment proposed by the member for Caboolture. I will come back to the reason for that very shortly. I might say that the views of the member for Caboolture and supported by the member for Tablelands and others—and I say this with the greatest respect—were based on rumour, innuendo and shallow media reports. In my view, One Nation is being manipulated by disaffected people pursuing a 10-year-old vendetta between outside individuals. I think that it is unfortunate that, in its first contribution to the debate in this House, we saw One Nation getting into the gutter in attacking a number of Ministers in a way that I believe was simply unhelpful to the sound running of a decent Parliament. I say—and I do this in the kindest possible way—that it is absolutely essential that, if we are going to run a decent Parliament, when members raise issues they should at least have the decency to test them and, I believe, should not make wild allegations that simply are totally unsubstantiated. I will come to the detail of that very shortly.

I make the further point that I believe one of the reasons why One Nation has 11 members in this Parliament is that there is significant disenchantment with the major parties in how they behave—something with which the members of One Nation would agree. Today, they behaved in exactly the way the major parties have behaved for the past 25 years, which is why they are here. I think that a lot of people who voted for the One Nation members would be disappointed in the way in which they have behaved. I will come back to that.

In relation to the amendment proposed by the honourable member for Surfers Paradise, I indicate to him that the Government is opposed to a significant part of his amendment. I accept the amendment moved by the Transport Minister, which acknowledges that the House recognises the commitments given by the Premier to the member for Nicklin. Obviously, I have discussed this matter with the member for Nicklin. It is quite clear and appropriate that that acknowledgment be on the record. There is no doubt about that at all. That letter that I wrote to the member for Nicklin is on the public record. I tabled it in the Parliament. However, the Leader of the Opposition and his team know that what he tried to do with the amendment is just simply gamesmanship. It is just politics and it is nothing more. It is designed to try to give the Opposition the opportunity to try to bring down the Government on any whim at any time. That is what it is about. It is about trying to get out of the commitment that I gave to the member for Nicklin that we would not have an election before 5 May 2001.

Mr Borbidge: They're your commitments.

Mr BEATTIE: Let us forget about the nonsense. The Leader of the Opposition ignores that if the member for Nicklin believes that at any time I or my Government has not lived up to the commitments I gave in that letter, he has options. He can come into this House and vote with the Opposition, and that is the end of the Government. The Leader of the Opposition knows that. That

option and powers rest with the member for Nicklin. So let us expose the nonsense. It is done. That is why accepting the part amendment that was moved by the Minister for Transport is the sensible thing.

Mr Borbidge: That's the reason you should accept the amendment.

Mr BEATTIE: What I just said exposed the nonsense of the Leader of the Opposition once and for all. It is finished.

I move to the other issue that is important, and that is the Heiner matter. I am going to deal with this Heiner matter in some detail because the One Nation members have been duped. I say this with some degree of respect because I understand, as they are the new players on the block, that some of the old hands who have been around are going to try to take advantage of them. I say to the member for Caboolture that, in good faith, I am going to go through this matter stage by stage, step by step, and explain exactly what the position is.

In 1989, the then National Party Government established the Heiner inquiry into management issues raised by the union representing staff of the John Oxley Youth Centre. Because the previous National Party Government had not properly constituted the inquiry, there was no legal protection for Mr Heiner or the witnesses who were giving evidence. In other words, the inquiry was improperly established by a previous Government. The National Party Government got it wrong. That is a fact. There is no argument about it. None of the people briefing the One Nation members will argue about that. That is fact one.

On that basis, the Crown Solicitor advised that the investigation should not continue and that the documentation should be referred to the State Archivist for destruction, because the inquiry was wrongly established and because there was no legal protection for witnesses who gave evidence before the inquiry. Following careful consideration of these issues over three Cabinet meetings and on the basis of advice from the Crown Solicitor, the Goss Government authorised the destruction of material collected by Mr Heiner.

In February 1995, the then Attorney-General, Dean Wells, made a statement to the Queensland Parliament at which time he tabled copies of advice from the Crown Solicitor. Nothing was hidden. The legal advice is on the record of this Parliament.

Let us go back. On 5 March 1990, Cabinet was informed that representations had been received from a solicitor representing certain staff at the centre. At that time, no formal legal proceedings had been instituted, nor was any legal action subsequently instituted. Never! There was no legal action at any time. Never! At all times Cabinet acted in complete good faith to protect the whistleblowers involved in this case. This was about protecting the whistleblowers. These whistleblowers were given no legal protection whatsoever by the previous National Party Government in the way in which the inquiry was established. All relevant legal advices from the Crown Solicitor to the Goss Government were tabled in this Parliament in February 1995 and provided to the Senate inquiry into unresolved whistleblower cases. Subsequently, considerable further information was given to the Senate inquiry.

There was no cover-up and there has never been a cover-up. This matter has wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars of public money. This matter has been the subject of inquiries—and members should listen to this—by two Senate select committees. At least twice a Senate privileges committee has considered the matter; the Criminal Justice Commission has; the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee has; EARC has; the Auditor-General has looked at it twice; the Connolly/Ryan inquiry has; and, more recently, this matter was the subject of a report by Tony Morris and Mr Edward Howard. The matters they raised were referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

On the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the coalition Government decided to take no further action. So nothing could have been more thoroughly investigated. How much longer are we going to waste thousands of dollars on this business? The Parliamentary Criminal Justice Commissioner now has custody of the Connolly/Ryan records—

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Wait a minute. It is not finished. The Parliamentary Criminal Justice Commissioner now has custody of the Connolly/Ryan records to see whether further investigation is required. The process is ongoing, notwithstanding all these investigations. Yet again, I am prepared to table the same documents for the information of the Parliament so that those unfounded and mischievous allegations can be dismissed once and for all.

I have discussed this matter with the Independent member for Nicklin. I promised him accountability. I promised him that I would have an open Government. As a result of that discussion with Peter Wellington, I have promised him that tonight I will table the Cabinet documents in the Parliament. I will table them because of the commitment I gave to the Independent member for Nicklin. Those Cabinet documents confirm exactly what I have told Peter Wellington privately, and they will now confirm to all the world exactly what the case is.

I go one step further and I table all these relevant Cabinet documents, because when they are examined the people of Queensland can see the precise advice on which Cabinet acted. The chair of the recent Senate committee of inquiry concluded this—

"In respect to the shredding of the Heiner documents I do not believe there is any evidence of a political conspiracy on behalf of the government. A newly elected government was confronted with a problem created during the term of the previous administration. The government sought advice through the correct channels and, irrespective of whether the advice was correct or not, it acted upon the advice that was given."

That is clearly not a party political person from our side of the fence. It is clear that an independent Senate chairman reached that conclusion. What I am doing today in tabling these documents is unprecedented, but I want to make clear that I do this to fulfil a commitment I gave to Peter Wellington and I do it because, as far as I am concerned, my Government is entitled to start on a clean sheet.

I will not regard this as a precedent. I have previously refused to release these documents because I am totally committed to the principle of Cabinet confidentiality, and I am not going to do this again. I am doing this for the two reasons I gave. First, this motion being debated tonight is the most important motion that my Government will ever have to debate. This is the motion establishing my Government's credentials. Therefore, I am not prepared to allow that establishment of confidence to be in any way impaired. The second commitment is what I said to Peter Wellington when I met him and when I corresponded with him. I promised accountability and I will fulfil that promise by tabling these documents. I want to make it clear: this is not a precedent and I will stick to the principle in which I believe very strongly and passionately, that is, Cabinet confidentiality.

I believe that the member for Nicklin was right in his speech today, which was an excellent speech, when he said that the real enemy is unemployment. That is what we ought to be talking about. We ought to be talking about the things that can improve and change people's lives. That is what we ought to be doing, not playing senseless games and wasting taxpayers' money. Of course I feel angry that we waste our time on these matters.

Let us as a Parliament debate what is important, and that is improving the lives of all the people we represent. The Heiner documents do not do that. We have a personality conflict, a bitter one admittedly, that had nothing to do with the Labor Party, that goes back a long time, and we have been caught up in it. I have tabled these Cabinet documents tonight, having declined to do so in the past, because my Government is entitled to start with a clean bill of health. I stress that again.

Today, One Nation members, despite claiming that they were going to raise the standards of the Queensland Parliament, made scurrilous and unfounded attacks on the integrity of five of my Ministers. The very suggestion that any of these Ministers would have deliberately and corruptly suppressed evidence of child abuse is offensive in the extreme—absolutely offensive. If One Nation members want to behave in that way, they will be judged badly by the community. One Nation's first action in this Parliament was to use parliamentary privilege to attack the personal integrity of five of my Ministers. The tabling of these documents not only exposes the fraudulent dishonesty of One Nation's behaviour, but also ends once and for all this ongoing waste of taxpayers' money and the abuse of parliamentary privilege.

Let us look at the documents I will table. First of all, as one of the Cabinet documents indicates, the destruction was under the terms of section 55 of the Libraries and Archives Act of 1988. It was done under an Act of Parliament. It was not done without some authority; it was done on Crown law advice under an Act of Parliament.

Let us look at what I am tabling. I am tabling Cabinet submissions Nos 100, 117 and 160. I table them for the information of the House. They relate to the three Cabinet meetings at which these matters were discussed. On 21 February 1995 in a ministerial statement on the Senate Select Committee on Unresolved Whistleblower Cases, the then Attorney-General, Dean Wells, outlined a lot more of the details. Because I have limited time tonight, I table that statement as well and I urge members to read it. It is an excellent statement that explains more detail than I have.

In addition to that, I also table the following documents: a copy of a letter to the Acting Director-General of the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs from the Crown Solicitor dated 18 January 1990; a copy of a letter to the Acting Director-General, Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs from the Crown Solicitor dated 19 January 1990; a copy of a letter to the Acting Director-General, Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs from the Crown Solicitor dated 23 January 1990; a copy of a letter to the Acting Secretary to Cabinet from the Crown Solicitor dated 16 February 1990; and a letter from the then Acting Cabinet Secretary to the State Archivist seeking permission to destroy all documents obtained by Heiner during the inquiry. Mr Speaker, you have got the lot. Now there is no excuse for this nonsense to continue.

I will refer to a couple of aspects of these documents so that they are on the record of this Parliament. Let us look at the Crown law advice provided on 18 January 1990, signed by K. M. O'Shea, the Crown Solicitor. What did he say to this? This is the Crown law advice. He said—

"I note your instructions that Mr Heiner was not appointed by the Governor in Council to conduct this inquiry which, of course, means that the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1954-1989 has no application to the inquiry."

In other words, people were not protected. He went on—

"The effect of this is that Mr Heiner cannot subpoena witnesses or examine them on oath nor can he subpoena documents in the possession of any person."

So in other words, no-one had any protection. The whole inquiry was flawed. That is Crown law advice, not my opinion. Let us move on to what else was said. A letter from Crown law on 23 January 1990, again signed by K. M. O'Shea, states—

"I do not see any difficulty in destruction of the material supplied to Mr Heiner, naturally any material removed from official files should be returned to those files but the tape recordings of interviews had with people or any notes or drafts made by Mr Heiner should I suggest be destroyed."

That is Crown law's advice. They are not my words; they are from Crown law. I table these documents. The record speaks for itself. Honourable members can read all these other documents. As far as I am concerned, this Government is not going to waste one more cent on this personal vendetta that exists between private individuals. Enough is enough. It is over.

Let me move on to the other matters raised in the debate. A number of matters were raised in relation to issues, particularly in relation to the history of this State and how people were perceived either in Government or in Opposition. One of the things that disappointed me during this debate was that no-one came up with an alternative to the Labor Government. No-one came up with a strategy that says, "Here is a better alternative to provide certainty or direction to this State." From that point of view, I believe that those members in this House who are genuinely interested in the future of this State will support the motion of confidence in my Government.

I believe that members opposite have failed the simple test of putting forward any plan for an alternative Government. However, what was put forward, particularly by members of the coalition, was a grab bag of negatives. The coalition front bench, just four weeks after many of its members left their ministerial offices, was bereft of one positive idea. I did not hear any positive ideas from members opposite about what this State should do over the next three years. I did not hear one alternative to the structure that we offer to give certainty.

Over the past 12 or 14 hours we have heard about 40,000 words from the Nationals, the Liberals and One Nation. I did not hear a paragraph which put forward a better recipe for Government for the next three years than the one offered by Labor. I could not find a sentence that offered more certainty for Queensland than is offered by the Labor Government. I did not notice a single phrase which contained even a hint about a better solution than Labor's. I did not even recall five words out of those 40,000 words that were constructive.

What has the public gained from today, apart from a passing headache? The Nationals and Liberals have told us that they ran a wonderful Government. If we believe that, clearly the people got it wrong when they voted recently. I do not believe that we can treat the electorate with contempt. Let us look at the voting figures. A number of members made reference to the voting figures. Some disputed my figure of 53% for the two-party preferred vote. I accept that because of the nature of this election it is difficult to determine a two-party preferred vote. But as someone who has spent years calculating votes, I know that it can be done. A 53% two-party preferred vote for us is a modest assessment of what we would have got on two-party preferred terms, had it been distributed.

However, let us take the primary vote. I am happy to pursue the argument. The first preference votes in the 13 June State election were as follows: Labor, 38.9%; One Nation, 20.7%; Liberal Party, 18.1%; and last—in every meaning of the word—was the National Party, with 15.2%. So what we have is a Leader of the Opposition who has the audacity to come into this House and say that I should not form a Government when the party that he leads received 15.2% of the vote of the people of Queensland. I ask all Queenslanders: do they believe that the Premier should come from a party that can receive only 15% of the vote?

Mr Hamill: One in seven.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, one in seven. Let us have no more nonsensical arguments about statistics. If members opposite want to cite the primary vote figures, that is fine with me.

Mr Littleproud interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I can understand the member's disappointment. The primary vote figures are very, very clear. Whether we argue this on a two-party preferred basis or on a primary vote basis, there is absolutely no doubt that my Government has the credentials and the support of the people of Queensland to form a Government.

I turn to a number of the other issues raised. Questions were raised about unemployment and whether we would reach our target. I understand—and I have never pretended otherwise—that my 5% unemployment in five years target is tough. It is difficult. Of course it is tough and of course it is difficult. However, the difference between us and the Opposition is that we are prepared to have a go. I am determined that we will do everything we can to reach that target. But what did the former Treasurer's Budget papers say? They said that unemployment would go from 8.5% to 8.75% in the next year. In other words, in the draft Budget she brought down she was saying to Queensland that there would be 9,300 more Queenslanders unemployed this financial year than last year, and yet she has the hide to come in here and attack me on the basis of unemployment. At least I am prepared to have a go, and so is my Government.

A number of references were made to the issue of WorkCover. A number of comments were made about our trying to attack the WorkCover scheme and about how workers compensation was going to run into difficulties. What the Opposition has not told the truth about is this: in the last Parliament, the Government tried to make a number of changes to WorkCover. The Opposition joined with the Independent member for Gladstone to protect that scheme. I pay tribute to the Independent member for Gladstone for the role that she played in that. That scheme was basically a continuation of the Goss Government scheme introduced at the end of 1995. We now see the success of what was achieved. The scheme is now moving into the black; it is now moving in the direction it ought to be. It is a credit to us that we had the courage to take that stand.

I make no apology for saying that we will drive the issue of apprenticeships and traineeships. In respect of industrial relations, we will drive an arrangement that not only gives average Queenslanders a fair go in the workplace; our scheme will also create employment opportunities. That is why one of the first proposals that the Minister for Employment—and we have a Minister for Employment—brought to Cabinet was to establish a fund that would create 3,000 apprenticeships over the next three years. Do honourable members know why that is necessary? It is because for too long Governments in this State have failed to skill up the work force. They have failed to give our young people an opportunity. That is why that fund is important. I will not move away from apprenticeships and giving our young people a chance. That is why we have to skill up our work force. That is why that is an important initiative—an initiative that the former Minister toyed with but backed off on, because he did not have the courage to go ahead with it.

Industry has applauded us for our courage in introducing the fund that will create those 3,000 apprenticeships, because it knows we need them. All members of this House should be appalled by the fact that last year a major firm in north Queensland had to import boilermakers from South Korea. Does the honourable member know why? That was because we had not done enough in relation to apprenticeships and traineeships to provide apprenticeships here for boilermakers. I will tell the House this: we will be creating opportunities for boilermakers and all of the other trades so that we skill up our work force. If we do not have skills we cannot create long-term jobs.

Let me turn to financial matters. I turn to the comments by members opposite in relation to the costing of Labor's election promises, and in particular the alleged black hole that was supposedly found by Treasury in Labor's costings, according to the Leader of the Opposition. Treasury is like a reliable, well-oiled machine. If we put data in the machine, it will accurately process it. If the Leader of the Opposition wants certain questions answered, he will get the answers to his questions.

Mr Borbidge: That is what you did with KPMG.

Mr BEATTIE: No. But the Leader of the Opposition will not get the truth. The truth is what we got from KPMG. We did not get involved in trickery. There were no half-smart questions. We went to an international firm of accountants that has a world-class reputation. We put all of our books on the table. There was no trickery, which is what we saw from members opposite. Here we had a world-renowned firm of accountants whose reputation was on the line. It gave us the clean bill of health that we needed. But what did we find when we got there?

Mr Hamill: It wasn't pretty.

Mr BEATTIE: It was not pretty. We found that so many of the former Government's election promises had not been funded. A good illustration was the development on the Cairns seafront.

Mr Hamill: At the Esplanade.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, it was on the Esplanade. The former Government simply went to Cairns and promised \$4m. When we went to have a look, where was the money? It was not funded. \$120m—and you denied this—

Mr Hamill: The Pacific Motorway.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, the Pacific Motorway. I have a letter from the former Transport Minister that said that we were \$120m short. Yet the member opposite said that it was not true. Here we have its own Minister who wrote to Treasury explaining it. The former Government ran the books of this State like Christopher Skase would. That is what it did. It should not try to pretend that it did not.

I will return this State to frugal management. That is what this Government will do. I will stick to every one of the commitments that I gave to the Independent member for Nicklin. The previous Government ran this State like Christopher Skase would, but I am not prepared to do that. I repeat very clearly: in relation to the commitments that we gave, Labor can deliver its capital and current program without imposing any new taxes or increasing existing taxes and charges above current real levels. We have already seen what the Treasurer pointed out today: a \$750m carryover of capital works. The former Government did not even deliver on that.

Mr Hamill: Total carryover.

Mr BEATTIE: Sorry, total carryover. It did not even deliver on it. No wonder they were saying that unemployment would go up by 9,300.

Let me conclude by saying that Queensland needs a Government that can drive this State forward. That is what we offer. I am sick of the political games, and that is all that we have seen for the past 12 hours. We have seen nothing constructive. Queenslanders want a positive, constructive Government, and that is exactly what they are going to get.
