



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 16 September 1998

MR SPEAKER'S RULING Motion of Dissent

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (8.40 p.m.): I am opposed to this dissent motion. I have to say that in the time I have been here I have heard some humbug and I have heard some pretence. However, I have to say that I have never heard so much nonsense as we have had in this debate. The interesting thing is that the current Opposition cannot cop it. When we were in Opposition for the last two and a half years we sat there, and how many dissent motions did we move against Neil Turner? The bottom line is: none!

This is a continuation of the track record that we saw from this Opposition when it was in Opposition last time. At every opportunity those opposite moved dissent motions against Jim Fouras when he was Speaker, and they will do it again. We were prepared to give the Speaker from the National Party, Neil Turner, a fair go. We do not find the same tolerance from Mr Borbidge, the Leader of the Opposition, and his team. Those opposite are not prepared to do it because they want to disrupt Parliament.

The Opposition wants to use every opportunity to bring this Parliament into disrepute. Yes, we have tried to lift the standards, but it takes two to tango. The Opposition seeks to denigrate our efforts at every opportunity.

What I find extraordinary is this: the Opposition came in here and it had a mission. That mission was to try to undermine the Forde inquiry. That mission was to try to denigrate one of the deputy commissioners, Hans Heilpern. The Forde inquiry is the first inquiry that has been established into child abuse—an inquiry that will have a real look into child abuse—for decades in this State. In fact, if I recall correctly, it is probably the first major inquiry we have had into child abuse.

The Opposition's agenda was very clear. Those opposite came in here to denigrate the process of that inquiry. What happened? I responded in a very direct way. Of course I will respond in a direct way when it comes to defending a full independent inquiry into child abuse. I will defend any inquiry that is designed to get to the bottom of child abuse. I want to make certain that that inquiry has every opportunity to pursue child abuse.

The One Nation members came in here and raised a number of matters in relation to various issues. During that debate I said to the members of the One Nation Party that the Forde inquiry would be an independent inquiry that would get to the bottom of the general claims—not in terms of the shredded documents—of child abuse at John Oxley. I said that that inquiry would have that latitude and that purpose. That was clearly my agenda. I made clear to the House, as I did to One Nation, what the agenda was.

I was not going to take it very lightly when the National Party and the Liberal Party came in here to try to undermine the inquiry which my Government had established in good faith to deliver the outcomes that all members on this side of the House wanted and, dare I say, that the One Nation members wanted in relation to John Oxley. Of course I was going to feel strongly about it.

Let us look at what happened in the heat of the exchange, as the Deputy Leader of the National Party referred to it. Let us read the full context. This is what Hansard shows for 27 August 1998. It says—

"Mr BEATTIE: We are the only Government to have established a proper inquiry. The Leader of the Opposition was in Cabinet when the National Party sought to establish that flawed inquiry in 1989.

The truth is this: this man has been under attack from the Opposition for two days. They are yet to provide one shred of evidence. The process that was gone through to examine this—

Dr Watson: Did you know about the allegations?"

I had been talking about the Opposition. Right? I had an interjection from Dr Watson, and I then went on to say this—

"I am answering your question. The process that was gone through to examine the man's credibility and suitability for appointment was thorough, and you have not found one matter in the last two days that detracts from his appointment—not one. If you have the material, then put it up."

This is in reply to the interjection from Dr Watson. I went on—

"I repeat what I said yesterday: your behaviour"—

and then I made it clear—

"the Opposition's behaviour here is supporting the child molesters and the abusers."

The Opposition's behaviour! It is clear— absolutely clear. It is game, set and match.

Those opposite asked, "What about the television replay?" When did those opposite see the television replay? They saw the television replay after they had been in the House and after they had moved their motion of dissent. What a lot of nonsense. The bottom line is that I was referring to the Opposition, and the Leader of the Opposition knows it.

It is said that I supposedly pointed a finger. I clearly recall what I did. I went like that. It does not matter about the indication.

Mr Borbidge interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: The Leader of the Opposition says I went like that. It does not matter. If you point your finger, you have to start somewhere. You have to start there or there. If I go like that and I refer to the Opposition, presumably that means everybody unless there is something loaded in my finger that the Leader of the Opposition knows something about that I do not.

This is an absolute nonsense. The word of the record says, "The Opposition's behaviour here is supporting the child molesters and the abusers." The case is black and white. It is shut. There is no argument about it.

Let me just speak to you, Mr Speaker, about another matter. Mr Borbidge, the Leader of the Opposition, can be sensitive about these matters. Later on the same day the Leader of the Opposition rose to a point of order. He said—

"I rise to a point of order. I refer to the comments made by the Premier yesterday in which he said, 'Here today those opposite are supporting the abusers. They are covering up for the paedophiles. They are covering up for the abusers.' They were the words."

I go back to another misinterpretation by the Leader of the Opposition. On page 1197 of Hansard on 27 August 1998—those opposite can check this for themselves—I said—

"This is the most dishonest performance from any Opposition in a generation."

Mr Borbidge said—

"Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order."

Listen to this—

"I am getting used to being subjected to personal abuse by the Premier, according to his brave new standards in Parliament. I find those remarks offensive and ask that they be withdrawn. He referred to me as being dishonest."

Hansard shows that I said—

"This is the most dishonest performance from any Opposition in a generation."

It is there in black and white. It does not refer to the Leader of the Opposition as an individual at all. I got up and said this—

"I was referring to the Opposition as being dishonest."

Mr Borbidge said—

"He said 'the Opposition Leader'."

It is shown in Hansard in black and white. It is not my fault if there is some difficulty in hearing on the other side of the Chamber.

I have had a look at Standing Order 119 and Standing Order 120 and I do not intend to waste any time on those. Neither of them is relevant to this dissent motion. They do not even hit the surface. There is no relevance whatsoever.

Let us come back to the point. It is important that the Speaker's ruling is respected and adhered to. This is taken so seriously in the House of Commons that it is taken as read that the Speaker is always right. In the House of Commons there is no allowance for dissent motions to Speakers' rulings. Nor is there in Canada. In 1986 a Privileges Committee of the House of Representatives recommended abolition of dissent motions to Speakers' rulings. But this has not been carried out.

There has been only one other example of a similar attempt like this in this Parliament in relation to Standing Order 120. I have to say with some embarrassment that it was moved by the Labor Party in 1973. Do honourable members know what happened? The Labor Party lost. Do members know why Labor lost? Because the arguments I am putting to the House today are almost identical to what the Liberal Party and the National Party put in 1973. It was a Labor Party stunt in 1973. It happens to be a National/Liberal Party stunt in 1998.

In the debate on dissent the Acting Premier Sir Gordon Chalk said this—

"The point at issue is the authority of the Chair and your absolute right to make decisions without fear or favour and devoid of political humbug which, quite candidly, in my opinion, seems to be creeping into this Chamber more and more."

I could not agree with Sir Gordon Chalk more. If we are going to have a Parliament for the next three years that runs with some degree of dignity, Mr Speaker, you have to be prepared to follow the Standing Orders. When the Opposition comes in here on an assassination bid on an inquiry into child abuse I will take a firm stand, all right. When I talk about the Opposition I will talk about those opposite directly, but I will not breach Standing Orders.
