



Speech by

Dr PETER PRENZLER

MEMBER FOR LOCKYER

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Dr PRENZLER (Lockyer—ONP) (9.36 p.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker, please pass on my congratulations to the Speaker on his election to the most important position in the House. I am proud to represent the electorate of Lockyer and I thank the electors for their support. I hope that my relationship with the voters in my electorate will be strong, responsive, responsible, accountable and long term.

But my speech today cannot be the normal maiden speech. The gravity of the matter facing this Parliament does not allow me that luxury after thoroughly examining the available evidence on the affair now named Shreddergate. I can only support the vote of confidence in the Beattie Government with an amendment that makes available all relevant Cabinet documents. The alleged corruption associated with the shredding of the Heiner inquiry documents contaminates Mr Beattie's Government, Queensland's public administration and the criminal justice system. More importantly, the victims of these hideous crimes have not been heard. I want, we want and expect, their cries to be heard and justice to be done.

The Heiner issue is really about public trust and the betrayal of that public trust. Innocent victims have been caught up in a web of deceit. This deceit appears to involve public officials, both elected and appointed, who have been given—and some still hold—positions of trust.

In speaking on this matter, I am very aware that the honourable member for Nicklin, who has the casting vote in this Parliament, was a police officer, along with being a solicitor and a local government councillor. Every critical ingredient of Shreddergate should be of particular interest and concern to the honourable member for Nicklin.

Together with most members of this Chamber I read with horror and alarm the Courier-Mail report by journalist Michael Ware in which he told of the experiences of children, some as young as 10, being handcuffed to grates overnight and children being handcuffed to bars in painful positions for extended periods of time. We read of children being administered sedatives to quieten them down. Often these sedatives were administered by non-medical personnel.

I read with great sadness about a young child of 10 who was handcuffed to the stormwater grate for 11 hours—I repeat: 11 hours—overnight. This child stuffed his blanket down a grate rather than keep himself warm because he was frightened by his carers into believing that poisonous snakes came out of the grate at night time. This child was not guilty of any serious crime; he was hyperactive. The State was given the care of this child, not permission to abuse this child through intimidation and fear.

I want to congratulate the Courier-Mail on its coverage of this matter. I noted that its editorial on 4 June last called on whoever won office to hold an inquiry into it. One Nation will take up the challenge to investigate the allegations and to ensure that the dark clouds of mistrust hanging over this Government can be removed by seeking access to these Cabinet documents. This must be done, and it must be done before we can even consider any vote of confidence in this new minority Government. We, like all Queenslanders, must feel that our trust and faith in this Parliament are returned only through the delivery of these Cabinet documents for scrutiny. This action will cost the people of Queensland nothing, but it will show to the public the new integrity that this Government has promised.

I believe that the reason why Mr Beattie does not want to release these documents is that five—and I repeat: five—of his senior Ministers are deeply involved. They were involved in the decision to shred Cabinet evidence that was required for imminent legal proceedings. They ordered it so that what was contained in this evidence would never see the light of day. It was a deliberate act, and they are in it up to their necks.

One does not shred public records. Public records are the very lifeblood of democratic Governments. They keep Governments accountable. One does not shred them just because Executive Government wants to save public or elected officials from embarrassment or scrutiny. One does not do it. And it is an absurdity for any Government to argue in support of destroying public records to prevent accountability. The shredding plainly aided and abetted this misconduct. The Government of Queensland, with the fatal five sitting around the table, assisted in the obstruction of justice.

The Premier ought to be ashamed if the reported comments in the Courier-Mail from his adviser are proven to be correct. The parents of the 10-year-old boy who was handcuffed to the stormwater drain—the very boy who undoubtedly cringed in fear all night about the possibility of poisonous snakes attacking him from the drain; the boy who could have died from an asthma attack—were allegedly told to "get f'd" by the Premier's adviser when they tried to talk to him about the shredding of the evidence. What an outrageous, insensitive action to adopt when worried parents are suddenly informed that their child suffered such treatment while in the care of the Crown!

The Premier is a solicitor, and he must know the principle of Cabinet confidentiality. Our Westminster system provides for Cabinet confidentiality, allowing the deliberations to remain secret until 30 years later. Crown privilege is predicated on the principle that Cabinet operates lawfully and does not conspire to deliberately obstruct justice or to destroy public records for treacherous reasons, unless one accepts the premise that there is one law for ordinary Queenslanders and another for members of Parliament, especially Cabinet members. If the Premier is a man of integrity and he truly wants honest and accountable Government returned to this Parliament, he must support our call for the release of the necessary Cabinet documents. This action will cost the public nothing, but it will assist greatly in returning trust to Parliament and its members.

One Nation cannot have confidence in the Beattie Government, because it has shown no inclination to date to seek out the truth of this affair. It is a disgrace to our public administration. It will not go away until the doubt is removed. There are many aspects of Shreddergate where Queensland's public administration has failed and failed dismally, and none more so than the role of the State Archivist at the time of Shreddergate. What makes this matter so serious is that the former Attorney-General, the current Minister for Education, Mr Wells, the current Attorney-General, the Honourable Mr Foley, the current Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, the Honourable Mr Braddy, and the former Premier, Mr Goss, all have legal training and are qualified in the law. They really have no excuse.

One does not destroy material when one knows that it could contain necessary evidence for impending court proceedings. If the possibility of this is there, one safeguards this evidence. One does not deliberately destroy it for the express reason of preventing it from being used in those proceedings. The ordinary person in the street knows that. I dare say that even a child at school would know that. One certainly does not have to go to university to know that. But in this case we have Ministers—some qualified in the law and sworn in as solicitors and officers of the courts—sitting around the Cabinet table deliberately and secretly deciding to destroy evidence to prevent its use in impending court proceedings and to prevent exposure of suspected child abuse in a State detention facility. It is a total affront to the rule of law and the due process of law. These Ministers now ask us to give them a vote of confidence to govern this fine State. If these Ministers are prepared to practise honest and accountable government, let them release these documents for scrutiny. If the Government does not take this action, then the integrity as referred to by the new Premier will be questionable. It happened once; it can happen again.

I have taken the time to read the material associated with Shreddergate. I am at a loss to understand why the former Government never acted to expose the truth after the Morris/Howard report. The Australian Society of Archivists strongly asserts that Archivists should not be treated as rubber stamps by Governments wishing to rid themselves of potentially embarrassing records. Record creators must make available to the Archivists all pertinent information relating to ongoing legal and administrative significance of records subject to disposal determinations. The Australian Society of Archivists calls upon the Queensland Government to enact legislation that guarantees the future independence of the State Archivists, including protection from political interference, in order to ensure the integrity of the public record in this State.

This alleged corruption has remained unaddressed for far too long. I call upon this House to act and to act quickly and purposefully. I say to members: please remember the plight of the innocent abused child victims and act in accordance with your conscience when you vote.
