



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 16 September 1998

PUBLIC SERVICE AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (4.35 p.m.): I rise to speak in favour of the Public Service Amendment Bill and, in doing so, congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on putting it forward. It is a travesty and a tragedy that the Leader of the Opposition has to take this action at all, just as it is a tragedy that the Government does not have a semblance of integrity when it comes to honouring its promises.

The Public Service Amendment Bill is all about ensuring that the appointment of Public Service chief executives is restricted to the term of the Premier, and that is because the Premier's consent is required for their appointment. The purpose of this Bill is to allow the Government of the day to govern without hindrance and to govern with the aid of the chief executives in whom it has confidence.

When this minority Government scraped into power, the Premier promised new standards. The Premier spoke at length about politicians being among the least trusted people in the community. The Premier spoke about how he—the so-called champion of honesty and propriety—would set a new standard. But for all of the Premier's noble observations, he failed to realise that this was one of his backflips and a reneging on a stated policy. That is part of the problem that has led to the reputations of all MLAs being stained.

In September 1996 in the Sector Wide magazine of the Public Service the Premier, then as Opposition Leader, applauded the coalition Government for tying the contracts of Public Service CEOs to the term of the Government. The Premier welcomed this decision and said that—

"... such appointees should leave office immediately upon a change of government—and without a big pay-out from long suffering taxpayers".

Where do the Premier and his Government now stand? He has reneged. He has gone back on his word. In other words, he has done a backflip.

He has appointed CEOs with contracts of five years, far outlasting the term of this Government if it manages to struggle through the full term of three years. He has abused his position of trust and the good faith that was set in concrete by the now Leader of the Opposition. When Rob Borbidge became Premier, he was noble enough to know that it would be unfair for a new Government of a different political persuasion simply to have to inherit CEOs whom it may not necessarily want. He also knew that it would be unfair for the taxpayers of this State to have to fork out millions of dollars to terminate contracts.

Recognising that any Government could be guaranteed only one term at best, he ensured that the contracts of CEOs were tied to his term of office. The same degree of integrity cannot be claimed by Premier Beattie. Not only has he ditched the integrity displayed by his predecessor as Premier; he has also ditched the comments made to the Public Service journal. He has ditched his commitment to Queensland's thousands of public servants. When the Premier spoke of jobs, jobs, jobs, he was not talking about protecting the jobs of and providing work for mums, dads and their children; instead he was talking about the few public servants who are already on packages way beyond the \$100,000 mark. His first priority was to appoint those CEOs for five-year terms, contrary to what he said was good policy only two years ago.

It is interesting, too, that these contracts were awarded only to CEOs who had been given salary increases of up to 20%, or \$30,000 a year. No wonder the Premier gave them five years' job security.

In the case of the Department of Emergency Services, proven performer John Hocking was asked by the Beattie Government to leave. Only yesterday the Attorney-General claimed that his former director-general was unceremoniously dumped by the incoming coalition. It seems twisted logic, therefore, that he also chose to dump the director-general appointed by Mr Beanland. Apparently that was okay and not unceremonious at all.

The new director-general of the Department of Emergency Services is not a person I know well and I have no thoughts either way on his capabilities. He may turn out to be an excellent person with impeccable judgment. However, the incoming Minister of any department must have the right to determine his or her own CEOs—more so if that CEO is a political appointment of a Government now removed from office. Equally, the Minister should be able to do so without subjecting Queensland taxpayers to having to provide enormous payouts.

When it comes to integrity, this Government is a failure. When it comes to the proper treatment of public servants, this Government is a failure. When it comes to a proper regard for taxpayers' funds, this Government is a failure.

The private member's Bill presented by the Leader of the Opposition is all about realities. Not since the Goss Government terminated the contracts of career public servants in 1989 and 1990 has the community been convinced that all CEOs are non-political. Indeed, the appointment of many was overtly political during the Goss term. The action of the then Labor Government established a new playing field amongst CEOs. The incoming coalition obviously could not be expected to keep on board the political appointees of the Goss years, but non-political appointees, career public servants with real ability and impartiality, were retained in their CEO positions.

Simply put, CEOs are now essentially political appointments. That is the reality in 1998. They are appointed with the consent of the Premier. The era of knowing that a CEO has been a dedicated, non-political, career public servant was wiped out in many departments when the Goss Government took office. It was a tragedy, but the damage has been done and we must now work to ensure that the Public Service is not stifled by CEOs who do not have the confidence of the Minister of the day. That is a reality that was recognised by the coalition Government. That is a reality that is again being recognised here today by this private member's Bill.

Yesterday I heard the member for Nicklin speak about the cost to taxpayers of politicians' superannuation funds. I hope that he applies those same concerns when he asks himself whether it is fair for taxpayers to have to pay out enormous termination payments to bureaucrats whose appointments were political and whose appointments could have been linked to the term of the Premier they served. Indeed, I trust that all 89 members will choose to spare the taxpayer. I trust that all 89 members will support this Bill and entrench the integrity and honesty the Opposition Leader has already demonstrated. Equally, I trust that the Premier will remember the long-suffering taxpayers he spoke about in the Public Service journal.
