



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

Hansard 27 August 1999

TAB QUEENSLAND LIMITED PRIVATISATION BILL

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—ONP) (3.01 p.m.): I rise to enter this debate, and in doing so I again strongly state One Nation's principal policy with respect to privatisation and corporatisation of Government owned entities, and that is that we do not generally agree with it. Our reasons are quite succinct in that I have not yet witnessed a privatisation where staff have not been let go, sacked, downsized, retrenched, made redundant or just plain and simply given the DCM. Just as the member for Gladstone has stated, we, too, do not understand why Government instrumentalities cannot be run as private corporations have been, so that the Government makes the same money as these entities make when they become instruments in private enterprise.

Last year, we participated in two debates in Parliament in relation to the privatisation of the TAB. I also agree that, in these debates, many lost their way. We stated quite clearly that selling out was not going to be the answer. That was our opinion at that time, and it appeared that it was only going to be a short-term lift-out or a bandaid solution for this vital part of the racing industry. It appeared to be a shortcut for more Government spending. We were quite cynical in the fact that we thought that this fire sale of the TAB was only going to be used to fund election promises— and even then it was dubious as to whether or not this would work. At that time we highlighted that this was a classic case of killing the goose that was laying the golden egg. The figures made available to us from 1991 to 1997 showed that the TABQ returned \$584m in State taxes and other statutory remittances to Queenslanders. The Queensland racing industry also received \$335m in direct funding. What more could we possibly say other than to quote these figures, which showed that the TABQ was alive and doing well in this State?

This income, on the surface, appeared to be long term and in Queensland's best interests to maintain it long term. Selling, we thought, would be just a once-off fire sale. The TABQ, on the surface, was a sure-fire, self-funding entity and, it appeared, a sure-fire investment in Queensland's future. Selling it off was unthinkable. One Nation would never have supported the sell-off.

We must, however, look at the concept of privatisation. Is it all that it is made up to be? Will the privatisation of the TABQ really benefit the people of Queensland? Privatisation of the TABQ will not benefit the unemployment situation at all. It will not provide long-term unemployment relief to anyone. However, we do recognise the support that this Bill does have from the Miscellaneous Workers Union. Its spokesperson, Janice Mayes—and we only spoke with her this morning—has stated that, with the technological advances in voice recognition phone identification, workers in this industry were going to be eventual losers, anyway. We think of the Telebet workers and others in relation to these technological advances. This piece of legislation has been a vehicle by which a better redundancy package could be obtained for these workers affected by the privatisation downsizing of this portion of the industry.

Again, I heard with interest from the member for Sandgate that Deloitte was appointed the probity auditor. This is the same firm, I believe, of which the Deputy Premier spoke in relation to a sponsored trip to South Africa in his position as Minister for State Development. We will be looking very closely at the open, honest, transparent and accountable Government papers with respect to that probity audit.

I still feel, however, that the real loser in this debate is still going to be regional Australia. Federal Labor has shown its extreme lack of respect for regional Australia—and I have stated this once

before—with its well-known appointment of that fence-jumping turncoat, Mrs Kernot, as its spokesperson on this topic. Now, even under this Bill, the Queensland Government does not intend to do too much. It is still purposely taking away the non-TAB races in the bush. Some of those meetings mean more socially than in any other way, and it is a case of saying that we care about what rural communities think and what rural racing actually means to the bush. When will they learn? I call on this Government to ensure that non-TAB races are not taken away from rural Queensland. If more profits are to be genuinely gained through the privatisation of the TABQ, surely more races can be held and more support can be given to this rural industry. And as the member for Gladstone and the member for Lockyer pointed out, there is a flow-on from all these industries, especially the racing industry, in rural Queensland.

Mr Dalgleish: Indirect jobs.

Mr FELDMAN: Indirect jobs, yes. But let us get this into perspective. I know that Government restrictions do not allow Government and quasi-Government entities the latitude of a private company in the corporate investment area. I know that privatisation will give the TABQ a greater potential for profit, especially with the help of a stock market float. I also realise that this is a chance for the mums and dads of Queensland to gain financially by investing in this float. And hopefully, the ownership of the TABQ will still be retained in Queensland—if not Australian—hands.

I am acknowledging and giving this Bill support on behalf of the Queensland voters—the 438,000 One Nation voters—support that this Bill will not be a death knell for the workers in this industry, but a position to grow from in other areas of this industry that would have otherwise suffered from not giving the industry the freedom that privatisation allegedly allows to grow.

The only reason that One Nation will be supporting this Bill is that we have had consultation with all sides of the industry—the Queensland Principal Club, greyhound racing and harness racing—and especially from the side that matters so much to us and the one with which we have the most affinity, that is, those small and part-time workers of the Miscellaneous Workers Union. We have, as I said, been assured by Janice Mayes that should she start to smell a rat, she will let us know immediately, because this is not the intent of the Bill. All sides are supposed to be winners in this privatisation deal.

It has taken a lot of soul-searching for us here in this corner of Parliament to come to this decision to support this Bill. In reply, it was the alleged win/win aspects of the employee entitlement provisions of the Bill that managed to sway our conscious thinking. It was the genuine collaboration of all facets of the industry and the consensus of total support from within the industry, which does support some 23,000 workers, that finally convinced us to provide that support.

In closing, privatisation is a flawed and dangerous concept. In general, the people of Australia are totally against it. However, in this Bill I can see some light at the end of the tunnel for the workers. We have heard them use the expression that this was "forced" legislation. But overall, it was their tacit acceptance that this is the direction to take for the racing industry in Queensland that will, in fact, take it into the new millennium that led us to the decision that we will be supporting the Bill.
