



Speech by

**Dr DAVID WATSON**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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Hansard 29 April 1999

**MOTOR ACCIDENT INSURANCE AMENDMENT REGULATION (No. 2) 1999**

**Disallowance of Statutory Instrument**

**Dr WATSON** (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (3.47 p.m.): I move—

"That the Motor Accident Insurance Amendment Regulation (No. 2) 1999 (Subordinate Legislation No. 67 of 1999) tabled in the Parliament on 27 April 1999, be disallowed."

This regulation, which provides for a \$40 rise in the compulsory third-party motor vehicle insurance charge paid by all Queenslanders who own a car is one of the most hypocritical acts ever undertaken by a Labor Government.

**Mr Hamill:** You say that all the time.

**Dr WATSON:** I sometimes get concerned that I have to bring to the attention of the House and the public the hypocrisy of the Treasurer and other members in relation to all the actions they take. All members opposite should be ashamed to show their faces in their electorates for the hypocrisy they have displayed in supporting the rise in CTP.

**Mr Schwarten:** I hope you show your face in my electorate. My vote will go up.

**Dr WATSON:** I have been in the member's electorate. Everyone was saying that they just cannot wait until he leaves. Hansard records the member's hypocrisy and I will go through some of that in a little while. I will repeat some of his words and some words of his colleagues back in 1996.

I recall that, throughout 1996, there were a number of occasions on which Labor members spoke in this House about the coalition Government's move, in April of that year, to increase third-party insurance. As I said, in a moment members will hear some of that hypocrisy as recorded in Hansard. Firstly, let me remind all members in this place of the circumstances that surrounded the increase in the CTP three years ago.

In April 1996, the coalition Government was placed in the unenviable position of having to announce the first significant increase in CTP insurance for 11 years. Of course, during six and a quarter years of that period Queensland had a Labor Government, and Labor had just left office. That action was necessary based upon the independent advice of the actuaries and on the recommendation of the Insurance Commissioner, who had to take into account all the trends developing in the scheme.

**Mr Fouras:** What is different today?

**Dr WATSON:** I am going to address the hypocrisy of the member and his colleagues in a moment.

To maintain a fully funded CTP scheme in this State, we had to introduce that increase. But it was a \$66 increase that the Labor Party should have introduced when it was in Government. The former Treasurer, Keith De Lacy, was given the same information as we were given in January of that year, and he sat on it, saying and doing nothing about it. Mr De Lacy, the former Labor Government Treasurer, did not have the courage to make this decision even though he had the actuarial advice and the Insurance Commissioner's advice that the CTP scheme would be unfunded if action was not taken.

So the rise that we had to introduce in April of that year was not the coalition Government's increase in premiums. In fact, it was Labor's increase which Labor put off to try to hide from the political damage that it perceived would happen to it during the run-up to the Mundingburra by-election. The

former Treasurer even took the information to Cabinet, but Cabinet rejected it because it did not have the gumption to make the decision that needed to be made to safeguard people who were injured in accidents in this State. The current Treasurer was a member of that Cabinet, as was the current Premier. But as usual, they sat on their hands and did nothing.

On the other hand, the coalition Government, with the Treasurer, the member for Caloundra, was prepared to make the tough decisions. It was against that background that we witnessed a tirade of abuse and ridiculous assertions made by the Labor members who were then in Opposition. That hypocrisy is going to come back to haunt them. Let me start with the king of hypocrites, Mr Peter Beattie, the current Premier. He was so outraged by the rise in compulsory third-party insurance that he organised a Statewide petition. This is what he said in the House when he presented that petition on 25 July 1996—

"I table and present to the House the signatures of 15,107 Queenslanders who object to the huge increase in compulsory third-party insurance premiums which Mr Borbidge's Liberal Treasurer Joan Sheldon is taking from people's handbags and pockets."

He went on to say—

"Fifteen thousand one hundred and seven people would form a long queue if they were all to line up at the door of Treasurer Sheldon or Premier Borbidge to complain that they had been promised by the coalition that there would be no increased taxes and charges.

The signatures of these 15,000 people are only a small sample of the resentment and sense of betrayal that exists in communities throughout Queensland."

But, of course, Mr Beattie was not finished at that point. The honourable member for Brisbane Central saved his best for last. He said this—

"Battlers are having to scrimp and save for what is for them a huge hike of \$66 for their tiny old battered cars, while the well-off do not give a second thought as they flash the plastic to insure their luxury limousines."

"Flash the plastic"! I commend the Premier for his creative use of language, but I condemn him for his hypocrisy.

What does the Premier, Mr Beattie, now say to those 15,107 battlers who signed his petition in 1996? Does he say that he is sorry? Did he say that he was sorry when the Treasurer, Mr Hamill, raised the CTP just days after he was elected? And more importantly, did he say that he is sorry for the latest rise, which is clearly and surely within this Government and cannot be blamed at all on the coalition—given that he blamed us for the earlier \$22 rise? Did he write to them? Has he communicated with those 15,107 people on whom he has just imposed a \$40 increase and explained why his case is different and why he is being hypocritical? Of course he has not. He has not said that he is sorry, because hypocrites never say that they are sorry. Hypocrites try to find a scapegoat. And the Premier's scapegoat is ambulance-chasing lawyers.

In 1996, when that rise was left to us by the Labor Party, Mr Beattie claimed that we were too close to the insurers. But as soon as he got into Government and could have done something about it, he decided to blame ambulance-chasing lawyers. Then on 4BC the other morning, the Treasurer was talking about this issue. Not only did he blame the ambulance-chasing lawyers now; he even gave us a forewarning of who he is going to blame next time. He said, "Yes, it is going to go up again in a few months' time, and it will be the Federal Government's fault because of the GST." I have never known individuals who can think up other people to blame for the decisions that they have to make. They do not blame them when the issues come along; they try to blame them even before they occur.

Mr Beattie said that those people who signed that petition would make a long queue outside the Treasurer's office. I will tell him what will make a long queue. There was a long queue of Labor members in this place in 1996 saying some incredible things about compulsory third-party insurance. Where are those members now? They should be ashamed to show their faces in their electorates. But let me look at some of the hypocrisy of some of the members opposite. I notice that the honourable member for Mount Gravatt is in the Chamber. She will probably recall some of her words of wisdom during the debate on a motion to disallow a regulation on 16 May 1996. The member said—

"They have no way of managing the economy, the Budget or the third-party insurance sector without coming back every year to this Parliament"—

"every year"! We had been in office for only a couple of months—

"and to the people of Queensland and increasing the premiums with massive hikes like this.

Mr Speaker, I think that by now Queenslanders should be getting the message: when this Government is in financial trouble, it is going to hit the ordinary Queenslanders first and hardest."

That is precisely what this Government has done. Where was Ms Spence the other day when the Cabinet—her own Government—hit ordinary Queenslanders first and hardest? Where was she last week? Nowhere to be seen! Labor members showed no respect for the truth when commenting on the rise in the CTP.

On 25 July 1996 in the Grievances debate, the then member for Caboolture, Jon Sullivan, said—

"One certain side effect of the extra expense is that many registrations will not be renewed.

The use of unregistered vehicles will increase, and accidents involving those vehicles will bring added pressures to the Nominal Defendant Fund."

Blatant scaremongering was the order of the day for Labor.

The honourable member for Fitzroy, who at that stage of his career had not yet been compared with Mahatma Gandhi, made an amazing contribution to the CTP debate, as well. Mr Pearce claimed that, as a direct result of the CTP rise, more pensioners were hitchhiking. His exact words were—

"Did you know there are more pensioners out on the road thumbing a ride than ever before?"

What hypocrisy! Have their numbers increased recently because of the extra \$40 rise? Is Mr Pearce now driving around his electorate giving hitchhiking pensioners a lift because of Labor's rise in the CTP? He should be too embarrassed to be seen out in public, let alone stopping to give people a lift.

The hypocrisy of those opposite keeps coming. Let me read part of a speech by the honourable member for Currumbin, the Minister for Emergency Services. I am pleased to see that she is in the Chamber. Her speech was delivered on 27 November 1996 as part of her contribution to the disallowance debate on the Motor Vehicles Control Act. Merri Rose had quite a lot to say on the matter of increasing taxes relating to motorists. She said—

"What does this Government have against motorists? Since this Government came to power it has made Queensland's motoring public pay for all the Government's rash of election-time promises ...

People will just not register their vehicles because they will find it far too expensive to do so.

...

Queensland's motoring public does not deserve to be the whipping boy of a discredited Government desperate for cash.

This is a tax that hits the battler, the average, hard-working"——

**Mr Hamill:** Who said this?

**Dr WATSON:** The member for Currumbin said this. She said—

"This is a tax that hits"——

**Mr Hamill:** When?

**Dr WATSON:** I told the House. It was 27 November 1996. She said—

"This is a tax that hits the battler, the average, hard-working Queenslanders who rely on a vehicle to carry out their daily activities, such as getting to work or getting the kids to school. The increase may not worry some of the more affluent people. It may not sound very much to most people, but the ones who will be hit hardest are the ones who can ill afford it. One would not blame them or any Queenslanders for feeling angry and disillusioned by being misled into believing that they would not be hit by an increased tax by this Government."

If those words were true then, they are true today.

**Government members** interjected.

**Dr WATSON:** I don't have to. The hypocrisy of members opposite is astounding. I can quote the words of those opposite back to them.

**Mr Hamill:** What did you say? I will quote what you said.

**Dr WATSON:** You will be quoting your own words back to yourself.

**Mr Hamill:** I will.

**Dr WATSON:** The member for Currumbin was not silent in 1996 when the coalition was forced to increase CTP because Labor did not have the guts to do it. That is the critical thing. Those opposite could not wait to stand up for the battlers and pensioners.

In the CTP disallowance debate on 16 May 1996 the honourable member for Redcliffe claimed that the coalition Government had inflicted the greatest pain on pensioners. He said—

"Such an increase will reduce the disposable incomes of these battlers. I have spent quite some time in this House speaking about pensioners, battlers, their housing and so on."

The honourable member for Redcliffe was not in the Cabinet room the other day because he is the Speaker in this place. His own party is now reducing the standard of living of the battlers he was talking about at that time.

In summary, this rise in CTP is indicative of the hypocrisy in which Labor engages. In Opposition Labor said one thing, in Government it does the opposite. Labor promised no real tax increases, yet it has already hit Queenslanders with four very real tax increases in nine months. Labor stands condemned by this latest rise. I ask all those members opposite who were so vocal and so forthright in 1996 to vote with the Opposition on this occasion.

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