



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 24 August 1999

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER'S RULING

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (5.28 p.m.): I can hardly help agreeing with the final words of the Attorney-General. It is absolutely disgusting that we are debating this matter tonight. It is absolutely disgusting that the time of the House has been taken up with this matter when it should be used to address more important things, such as the unemployment of Queenslanders, the economic development of Queensland and what this Government is doing in regard to those kinds of issues. The member is right.

Why are we here? We are here because the Premier has not lived up to the standards that he proclaimed he would enforce when he became Premier. We are not here because we want to be. We are not moving this motion for that reason. We are here because this Premier has failed to live up to the standards that he rightly said that his Government and he would live up to.

In contrast to the trivial matters that the Attorney-General spoke about, I point out that two issues are associated with this motion. The first is the substantive issue of the failure by the Deputy Speaker to deal with the issue. The second issue is the Premier's use of unparliamentary language. I will address both of those issues in the context of this motion of dissent. I was speaking to the Bill when this exchange took place. I was pointing out to the House that the Premier had failed to table attachments to the letter, which he has now done, and the Premier stood up and objected. The Premier stated—

"I rise on a point of order. I find those comments offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn."

I said, "I will withdraw, but it is still true", and the Premier stood up and objected again. The Deputy Speaker said, "Order! The member will withdraw." I said, "I withdraw." Because the Deputy Speaker was not paying attention to what was going on, he did not hear what the Premier said. The Premier then threw off at the Clerk's office. That is the first point. The Deputy Speaker was in the chair at the time. There was an exchange across the Chamber to which the Deputy Speaker should have been paying attention. After all, he was adjudicating on it. He failed to hear what the Premier said. That was his first failure. I heard him object to what the Leader of the Opposition said earlier. However, it is obvious that he did not know what to do. He did not know how to address the behaviour. He failed to adhere to the standards of this Parliament and uphold members' expectations. That is the second reason that we have to dissent from his ruling. Firstly, he was not paying attention. Secondly, he did not understand what he had to do.

Thirdly—and this is what happens when a Deputy Speaker is not paying attention while in the chair and does not know what to do—there is a perception of bias. Recently, one of the things of which we have complained in this place is that, whether or not there is actual bias, there is the perception of bias. This is the perfect example of how it occurs. The Deputy Speaker not only failed in his duty to pay attention to what was going on and to know what to do under the circumstances; he also furthered the perception of bias in that case. That is why the motion of dissent is needed. Attention has to be drawn to these matters. When one is in the chair in this place one has to have one's mind completely on the job being carried out.

The second issue is the Premier's use of unparliamentary language. As I have said already, the Premier has failed to live up to the standard that he set when, on 4 August, upon the formation of this 49th Parliament, he stated—

"I gave a commitment to the people of Queensland and to the Independent member for Nicklin that I would do everything in my power and my Government would do the same to restore the dignity of the Parliament."

Some dignity! Swearing at the Clerk's office or at the clerk is—

Mr Wilson: Which is it? Get it right.

Dr WATSON: It is in Hansard. It is one and the same thing. We are not going to get into a legal definition. The fact is that there was a deliberate attempt by the Premier to denigrate the Clerk's office.

Mr Wilson: Which is it? Get it right.

Dr WATSON: Whatever it was, it was an abuse of parliamentary language. The use of—

Mr Beattie: It is central to the debate.

Dr WATSON: It is central to the debate. The Premier stated—

"And is it my fault that the bloody Clerk's office lost it?"

That is what the Premier said. He denigrated it. What he said was unparliamentary for a number of reasons.

Mr Beattie: You weren't even here to hear my defence, so how would you know?

Dr WATSON: What did the Premier say?

Mr Beattie: You weren't even here to hear my case before.

Dr WATSON: I was doing other things. I heard the Premier's comments. Firstly, it is inappropriate because it is an abuse of the parliamentary staff. It is inappropriate for servants of this Chamber or their office to be abused by any member. Secondly, the Clerk or any other staff member is not in a position to be able to respond. Irrespective of whether the Clerk's office lost it, it is not in a position to respond directly to a derogatory comment by the Premier or any other member in this place. That is inappropriate.

Mr Beattie: Are you going to apologise?

Dr WATSON: I do not have to apologise.

Mr Beattie: You should.

Dr WATSON: I do not have to, because all I did was point out the facts, and the Premier knows it. We were being very nice to the Premier; we gave him opportunities to respond earlier.

Thirdly, this affects the morale of the staff of Parliament House. Members cannot come into this place and denigrate the offices people hold without also affecting the morale right throughout Parliament House. The Premier may not care about that but, as a member of this place, I do. We get tremendous service from the staff of Parliament House in a completely unbiased and apolitical fashion. It is totally inappropriate for a Premier who is under pressure to take it out on the staff. That is totally unreasonable. It is a demonstration of poor leadership. When the Premier, who likes dishing it out—he is a jovial fellow—is under a bit of pressure, whom does he strike at? He strikes at people who cannot defend themselves. What sort of leadership does that provide in this place and for this State? Members opposite might think this is funny, but this is an important issue to the institution of Parliament in terms of how we conduct ourselves and how we expect others to view this place.

In conclusion, this is inconsistent with the behaviour that the Premier said he expects and which we all expect of every member of this place. I support the motion moved by the member for Indooroopilly and seconded by the Leader of the Opposition. It is absolutely critical to the proper functioning of this place that we maintain appropriate standards and do not take out on innocent servants of this place the frustrations that result from being under pressure, as did the Premier.
