



Speech by

HARRY BLACK

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Hansard 1 December 1999

ELECTORAL AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BLACK (Whitsunday—ONP) (9.40 p.m.): I rise to speak on the motion to refer the Electoral Amendment Bill to the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee, as moved by the member for Warwick. One of the most important aspects of Australia's democratic system of government is the electoral system. The transparency and integrity of the electoral system must be legislated carefully if the public is to have faith in Government. The electoral system at present leaves much to be desired. It astounds many that it is and has been in this poor state for the period that it has. It is clear that One Nation's Electoral Amendment Bill addresses some of these concerns with Queensland's electoral system. My One Nation colleagues have already mentioned the amount of research into and the number of reports prepared on improving the electoral system.

This Bill improves the truth in political advertising provisions of the Queensland Electoral Act 1992. Current members of this House have spoken on the issues that this Bill addresses at various times over the last several years, although no changes have been made to improve the Act. One Nation's Electoral Amendment Bill achieves what has been promised, discussed and complained about by both the Labor Party and the coalition, but which has never been fulfilled by either of them.

The Labor Party and the Opposition came to an agreement in 1995 to amend the Electoral Act to ensure truth in political advertising, but it simply did not occur. Newspaper reports at the time mentioned all sorts of dirty tricks being played by both sides of politics and several quotes are worth mentioning. The Australian of 15 July 1995 states—

"A Coalition government would amend the Electoral Act to make sure that these sorts of blatant deliberate lies could be attended to properly by the courts during the course of an election, Mr Borbidge said."

The Courier-Mail of 25 April 1998, in reference to the 1995 election campaign, stated—

"Honesty was a rare commodity throughout that campaign, which concluded on a positive and hopeful note when the then Premier Wayne Goss and then opposition leader Rob Borbidge gave an eve-of-election pledge. No matter which party was returned, there would be bipartisan support for an overhaul of the Electoral Act to ensure future elections would have truth in political advertising."

That same report explains why the legislation had not yet been introduced. It continues—

"Well, it is nearly three years later, the state poll is just around the corner and Borbidge, as Premier, has absolutely no intention of delivering. His side has attempted to prepare draft laws but it is just too difficult—too many technical and practical problems mean the proposals have been shelved. This is simply unacceptable and rightly, Opposition leader Peter Beattie had been protesting loudly..."

On 23 April 1998 another Courier-Mail article stated—

"The overhaul has ground to a halt because the politicians cannot agree on the definition of truth."

What sort of a joke is that? The truth is black and white. One would think that it would not be too difficult to determine. It was not too difficult for South Australia to introduce truth in political advertising laws. It was not too difficult for One Nation. Yet it has obviously been too difficult for the major parties in this

State to legislate so that they are unable to lie during election campaigns. It does not take much to see that there is more to this than meets the eye.

On 16 November 1995 the Honourable Matt Foley, the then Attorney-General, moved a motion to refer truth in political advertising to the parliamentary Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. This move was supported by the Opposition, which at the time was preparing shadow Attorney-General Beanland's Bill for the Parliament. Granted, the Opposition tried to do something about truth in political advertising with the member for Indooroopilly's private member's Bill in 1995. It lapsed due to the prorogation of Parliament. The point is, however, that the coalition was obviously not serious about making amendments to the Electoral Act, as evidenced by its failure to do something about it when in Government later. Back in 1995 when the then member for Lockyer, Mr FitzGerald, spoke regarding the issue he said—

"This motion is just like the story of St Augustine and his mother, St Monica, who prayed for him continuously while he was in Carthage. Honourable members may remember this piece of religious history. Saint Augustine said, 'I want to be converted and give up my sinful ways, but just not yet.' He wanted to continue his wild philandering ways and continue carrying on with the women and drinking and continue all the sordid activities that he indulged in as a young fellow; he always wanted redemption 'but just not yet'."

he continued—

"I believe that this is the position taken by the Labor Party in regard to this matter. Mr Kaiser in particular would love to say that he supports truth in advertising while being able to visit the site of any by-election that could possibly occur in the near future and lie through his teeth. He wants to be able to say, 'We are pure, innocent and believe in truth in advertising but just not yet.'"

It seems that this type of attitude has been displayed by both Labor and the coalition, as evidenced by our standing here now debating a One Nation Bill to ensure truth in political advertising in our electoral system. It is a disgrace that it has not already been introduced and that certainty provided to the people of Queensland. Is it too much to ask that those attempting to convince us to vote for them to lead, protect and provide for us will tell us the truth?

On 4 December 1996 the then Premier, Mr Borbidge, made a claim that he was pleased to reaffirm the Government's support for changes to the laws in respect of truth in political advertising. He referred to an article in the Australian of 15 July 1996, which stated—

"Queensland's political adversaries gave bipartisan support yesterday to legislating for truth-in-election advertising."

On 13 May 1998 the then Premier, Mr Borbidge, was asked a question about the integrity of the election process. His response was—

"The basis of our democratic system should be preselection and election procedures that are free from any suggestion of fraud or electoral corruption."

That is true, but where is the legislation to ensure that election procedures are free from any suggestion of fraud or electoral corruption, and why has it not already been assured? On 23 April 1998 the then Opposition Leader, Mr Beattie, stated—

"We offered bipartisan support for legislation to introduce truth in political advertising. We believe that telling the truth is essential, yet the Government has never got around to introducing the legislation. It was one of the Government's major planks in the 1995 election campaign, but it has not been introduced."

On 13 May 1998 the issue was raised again via a question to the then Premier about what action he would take to ensure that the integrity of the election process was maintained. The Premier of the day, now the Leader of the Opposition, responded by attacking the member for Brisbane Central about Labor withdrawing bipartisan support for truth in political advertising. Mr Beattie informed the House that he had given bipartisan support as the Leader of the Opposition, however, when the matter was referred to the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee the committee split along party lines and, thanks to the ALP, truth in political advertising was the victim.

Here we have a situation where both major political organisations supported truth in political advertising—and this is clearly documented in Hansard—yet the issue did not become law because of splits along party lines. It is interesting that these same people stood in this House not so long ago and informed Queenslanders that we do not need community-based referendums because the parliamentary system, supported by the party system, already ensures democracy and true representation of the people of this State.

It is obvious that the party system does not provide adequate representation and, if anything, hinders the democratic process because members do not vote according to the wishes of those whom they represent but according to party lines. I trust that the people of Queensland will see the outright rejection of all Bills introduced by the One Nation Party as a clear indication of the lack of representation

and democracy in the parliamentary system due to party politics. These actions also show the disrespect of the major parties for all Queenslanders because they put loyalty to their party above their responsibilities to the people of Queensland.

There have been many instances where members of the major parties have attempted to mislead and deceive the voting public and have been caught out in doing so. Surely they do not deny that they have been practising these tactics for many, many years—taking the public for fools and cheating in order to win. As I have shown, there have been many instances where members of the major parties have promised to shore up the Electoral Act so that truth in political advertising was assured. They have failed to do that. There has been ample time and, unfortunately, there have been ample excuses. Our governmental structure is pointless if the means by which it is established are corrupt. Anything that is built upon corruption will fail.

One Nation's truth in advertising Bill, namely the Electoral Amendment Bill, increases the integrity of the electoral process. It gives the public some certainty that what they are being told will be truthful. The public are sick and tired of being treated as mushrooms. The time has come to give the people the respect they deserve and introduce legislation that Queenslanders want and deserve.

One Nation's Electoral Amendment Bill is a Bill with which I am proud to be involved because it is another indication of One Nation's commitment to Queenslanders. It is modelled on successful South Australian legislation and strengthens truth in advertising provisions in Queensland's legislation. It ensures that all those responsible for false and misleading information are held responsible for their actions. It incorporates how-to-vote cards into the provisions.

This Bill is a good piece of legislation. It will improve the integrity of the electoral process in Queensland. It will provide Queenslanders with some faith in the political process and ensure that lying and cheating in order to win will not be accepted and that disrespect for the voting public will not be tolerated.
