



Speech by

KAREN STRUTHERS

MEMBER FOR ARCHERFIELD

Hansard 25 August 1999

SES POSITIONS, MERIT SELECTION

Ms STRUTHERS (Archerfield—ALP) (6.50 p.m.): I take pleasure in supporting the amended motion. In an appalling abuse of parliamentary standards and in fine Mafioso tradition, the member for Clayfield only yesterday tabled a hit list of public servants and board appointees made by this Government.

Mr SANTORO: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find the comments made by the honourable member for Archerfield very objectionable and I would like her to withdraw them.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will withdraw.

Ms STRUTHERS: I withdraw. The treatment of the Queensland Public Service by the Beattie Labor Government stands in contrast to this. The previous coalition administration sought to cheaply politicise public servants. When the Borbidge Government came to office in 1996, it sacked the vast majority of chief executives of Government and a number of other senior and middle order public servants. It also sacked whole boards across almost all Ministries and replaced many of them with coalition cronies.

In its ideological zeal, the coalition Government removed anyone who had the remotest connection with the Labor movement. The majority of directors-general were not even given the courtesy of hearing about their dismissals from their Minister or the courtesy of a telephone call to advise them of their fate. Even Max Moore-Wilton, the infamous "Max the Axe", when sacking Paul Barratt, the former Secretary of the Department of Defence in Canberra, recently, had the decency to inform him of his fate by telephone. Of course, the courts have subsequently ruled that Moore-Wilton had not gone far enough and given the reasons for that dismissal. In contrast, the Beattie Government did not renew certain chief executives' contracts—not because of a coalition-style purge but because the contracts had expired. But any chief executive with a current contract remained in office.

This is a Government that is both responsible and accountable to the people of Queensland. Appointments to the Public Service have been and will continue to be made on the basis of merit and equity. They will be made through open and accountable processes. Appointments to boards and committees have reflected and will continue to reflect a broad range of experience suitable to the portfolio area.

Let us not forget: it was the Beattie Labor Government that acted quickly to restore the fine traditions of the Westminster system in Queensland. It was not this Government that sent senior public servants and board members packing. It was not this Government that sought to politicise the Public Service through its cynical amendments to Public Service legislation to enable the appointment of chief executive officers for the term of particular Governments.

The hypocrisy of the coalition Government speaks for itself. The hypocrisy of the member for Clayfield is illustrated through his overt political attacks upon public servants, upon members of the business community and upon ordinary hardworking Queenslanders.

The member for Clayfield would have us believe that any appointment made by this Government has been made on the basis of political affiliation. His fleeting acquaintance with the facts conveniently allows him to ignore the fact that it was not the Beattie Government but his own that

sacked boards and public servants and appointed Liberal lackeys to positions they would not gain on merit, giving us the nineties version of Dad's Army.

It was the previous coalition Government that polarised the Public Service. Under its Government, numerous public servants were afraid to brief senior officers in departments, let alone Ministers. It not only polarised the service; it neutered and politicised it.

It is this Government that moved swiftly to return the principles of the Westminster system. It is this system of responsible Government that has traditionally ensured a level of accountability between the Public Service, the Cabinet, the Parliament and the people. This approach is of course despised by the Leader of the Opposition, who, in a media report of July 1998, was quoted as saying—

"Chief executive officers in today's public service are political appointees."

He said it. He admitted it. He did not focus on merit. Perhaps Mr Borbidge should have checked with Mr Santoro before moving this motion, which exposes the hypocrisy of his own coalition parties. The member for Clayfield's cowardly and deceitful attacks on hardworking, decent Queenslanders—servants of the public who cannot defend themselves in this House—are an absolute disgrace. I now know why people take an instant dislike to Mr Santoro: it saves time.
