



Speech by

Mr M. ROWELL

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard 25 August 1999

SES POSITIONS, MERIT SELECTION

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): The power industry has been at the forefront of the Government's chronic cronyism campaign. At the top of the heap is the appointment of the former member for Cairns and the Goss Government's Treasurer, Keith De Lacy, as head of Ergon Energy. I am sure that he will now use all of his Labor friendly creative accounting skills to try to cover the impact of the massive raid that has been made on the profits of the former distribution authorities that Ergon replaces. The budget that Ergon is going to have to maintain the entire distribution system outside the south-east corner has been positively gutted by this Labor Government. The letters in protest testify to that. The capital works budget has also been drained by the Government's insistence on the 95% after tax dividend for 1997-98.

Mr McGrady interjected.

Mr ROWELL: And we remember the Minister's little contribution. He cannot even add up. He needs to go back to school again.

There is no doubt that one of the faithful has been put in charge because the Government needed somebody who could be relied on not to spill the beans but who would let the transmission systems decay in silence. It is interesting to note that the former member for Cairns joins the former member for Logan, the former member for Redlands, the former member for Wynnum and the former member for Springwood in the group of people who have been looked after by this Government.

Cronyism is the power industry's biggest problem at this time. The blatancy in the clear bias towards people with Labor Party affiliations is unbelievable in the appointments to some of regional councils that now have a mere advisory role in place of real authority. Obviously, the real authority was getting too politically dangerous.

On the far-north Queensland electricity council, no fewer than five of the seven members have clear Labor Party affiliations. Despite his affiliation, nobody would argue with the appointment of the chair, Tom Pyne, because of his long service in the north. However, alongside him are a former Labor candidate in the Federal seat of Leichhardt, a former Cairns Labor branch president, the Cooktown Labor Party branch president and a former president of the Labor Party's Leichhardt division. That is not just a representative group and there is no doubt that they have been appointed for the same reason that Keith De Lacy has been appointed: that in the far north the Government needs a committee that will not make waves about what the Government is doing.

There is plenty to hide in relation to the old FNQEB area as the documents we recently obtained under FOI show, because Tom Pyne privately resisted Keith De Lacy's successor to the hilt in trying to hold off the demands for the 95% dividend. That is to his great credit. I acknowledge what Tom did.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr ROWELL: It is all the Labor Party hacks who surround Tom who are the problem. Tom told the now stood aside Treasurer that the FNQEB had already seen its credit rating downgraded, and that a 95% dividend would impact on maintenance and capital works, and was quite unsustainable. He effectively forced the then Treasurer and the Mines and Energy Minister to resort to a gazetted direction before he would part with the money. That is how strongly he felt about the issue. That is a fact.

Mr McGrady interjected.

Mr ROWELL: That is a fact. The Minister has read the documentation and he was involved in it.

The pressure on the maintenance program and the capital works program in the far north is obviously going to be intense for the Ergon Energy Group, which has inherited Old Mother Hubbard's cupboard. The Government needed people, particularly in the far north, who know how to keep their mouths shut.

A similar situation applies in the old South West Power area, where again there were particular problems. The former South West Power board was one of those that went along pretty quietly with the demands for the big dividend, but as my colleagues the member for Warrego and the member for Gregory know well, there is a massive maintenance problem developing across the region. That problem is developing for the same reasons that it has developed in the south-east and everywhere else in the State.

Time expired.
