



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.13 p.m.): I support the comments made by the honourable member for Indooroopilly. We have seen a great deal of hypocrisy and a great deal of the double standards of this Government. Just over 12 months ago, certain commitments were given by the member for Brisbane Central. Now, almost to the letter, those commitments have been betrayed by virtue of the power of one following the Labor Party's narrow victory in the Mulgrave by-election last year.

I think that it is pretty clear from the unity on the non-Government side of the House—the member for Nicklin, the member for Gladstone, the other Independent members, the members of One Nation and the coalition members—that in many respects today's events may represent a turning point in the life of this Government. I say to the member for Brisbane Central, who I think in a pique of arrogance decided not to justify the actions of his Government in the formal debate, that he does himself a grave disservice. When Governments for various reasons, even for good reasons, embark on action that is controversial, on action that requires justification to the community, there is a moral obligation on the Premier of the day to front up and be accountable—not to run and hide in the Cabinet room and not to come back in so that on his vote, indirectly, he can get through this travesty of the democratic process today. The honourable member for Brisbane Central has not been prepared to defend and support the actions of his Government as he proceeds to breach a number of the very clear undertakings that he gave the honourable member for Nicklin in exchange for the honourable member's support to form a Government just after the last State election.

In my view, the member for Brisbane Central is now the emperor without any clothes. He has been revealed as a sham, as a hypocrite, as a political fraud—as someone who will say and do anything in terms of his public stance but then turn around and be manipulated like a little puppet by his trade union masters. I would have hoped that if the Government was committed to going ahead with this legislation following the deals that were done with the trade union movement, at least it would have respected the spirit of this place.

Honourable members on this side of the House expected to be here tonight. The coalition's country members cancelled flights home and some others cancelled commitments that they had tomorrow morning because they did not mind the principle of having a good old fashioned parliamentary debate. We did not mind arguing our point of view in this place. However, we had a legitimate expectation that the Government of Premier Beattie would not dingo out of the process as it has done on this occasion. Today, we have seen a sell-out of accountability and a sell-out of proper and appropriate parliamentary debate. Today, we have seen motions passed by this Parliament that were not passed in the previous Parliament.

Since the 1995 election, we have had some very welcome reforms and a fair bit of goodwill in terms of making the Parliament work better by my Government and, up until recently, the Government of Premier Beattie. Today, that has all changed and, I suspect, it has changed for the remainder of this Parliament now that the member for Brisbane Central has taken it upon himself to use the extra seat that he has to do the things that he was not game to do or try when the member for Nicklin held the balance of power. I would have liked to have thought that over recent times there had been some maturing in the political process. We on both sides of the House may not have agreed with each other's

philosophical positions, but at least in the spirit of the democratic process we would have argued them, we would have debated them and we would have had a bit of banter back and forth across the Chamber. At least members would have been able to put their particular point of view. The Industrial Relations Bill was pushed through this place as a result of deals done with various unions, and I have spoken of that, the union law-breakers—not my words but the union law-breakers as determined by the Industrial Court—the CFMEU and the BLF.

Let us look at the Notice Paper. It is interesting that we had to look after the mates prior to the Labor Party conference. Never mind the miners, who will not get their leases granted because the Native Title (Queensland) State Provisions Amendment Bill is No. 14 on the Notice Paper and will not be dealt with in this place for another five weeks. This Premier is the same man who two years ago criticised my Government over delays in respect of mining leases, mining permits and mining approvals. Native title legislation is back in the House with 200 amendments because he made such a mighty botch-up of it after the Senate and the Federal Government gave him the wherewithal to fix it, and we will see the delays continue. We will see the uncertainty continue with respect to mining permits and land tenure. The new Land and Resources Court cannot be established until those amendments—which again relate to legislation that is No. 14 on the Notice Paper—are dealt with. Was that important to the jobs, jobs, jobs Premier or was some sleazy backroom deal with his union mates more important?

Is it not ironic that on the first anniversary of the election, 400 more Queenslanders are unemployed than when the coalition left office? Is it not a tragedy that this industrial relations legislation will do enormous damage to the process of job creation in this State? I refer to the QCCI survey on the cost of unfair dismissal laws that was released on 3 March. The figures show that an alarming 35% of businesses have employed fewer staff as a result of the unfair dismissal laws. The figures are even more disturbing for small business, with 50% of all enterprises employing up to 15 staff reporting that they had hired fewer staff as a result of the laws and 45.5% of businesses employing up to 99 staff returning the same comment.

Even in cases of extreme misconduct or incompetence, employers have been unable to dismiss employees or have incurred enormous expense in pursuing dismissals through the relevant tribunals. The consequence has been that many employers are not employing more staff to avoid those problems. Despite that occurring, earlier today this Labor Government used its numbers to reintroduce the unfair dismissal laws that were done away with by the coalition Government by way of regulation which gave small businesses employing up to 15 people an exemption for the first 12 months of someone's employment.

It is appropriate to reiterate that in the 12 months of this Beattie Labor Government, Premier Peter "Do-little" cannot put his hands on one major economic development project. The only projects that are effectively under way in Queensland today are those projects that were generated during the life of the previous Borbidge Government and, to a certain extent, the life of the former Goss Government. To be fair to former Premier Goss I am prepared to give credit where credit is due, which is more than this Government will do. It has shown blatant dishonesty in taking credit for projects such as Briztram and the Pacific Motorway. Good heavens! In 1995 that project was the issue. It was the reason that Labor lost six seats. The work of the honourable member for Gregory brought about that magnificent project, which this Government now has a jobs meter on. This is despite the fact that it cannot tell us what the jobs meter reads in regard to its Capital Works Program after an appalling and disgraceful admission that seven months into the financial year it has spent only one-third of its capital works budget.

Other projects include Phosphate Hill, which the Deputy Premier referred to this morning. In the Premier's reception room just down the corridor I signed off with Hugh Morgan on a \$25m State assistance package that made that project viable. The Century project was the work of the previous coalition Government. There was the Cairns Convention Centre, and the list goes on and on and on.

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: Members can ask Geoff Lockwood and Cazaly's. The honourable member reminds me of projects such as the Esplanade at Cairns, the Strand at Townsville and the Townsville Entertainment Centre.

Mr Fouras interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: I would have thought that a previous Speaker of this House would have known that it is in breach of the Standing Orders for someone who has never served as a Minister of the Crown to interject from the Government front bench, but then again he was Speaker for six years and he did not know much at all.

Mr MACKENROTH: I rise to a point of order. During the Estimates debate on the Legislative Assembly, it would be appropriate for the Speaker to interject from the Government front bench.

Mr BORBIDGE: The simple fact is that the Standing Orders of the Parliament are very specific on that issue and the Leader of the House knows it. This is not the Estimates process.

Mr Fouras interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: The member is back where he belongs—right down the back. He should go back a bit further.

Yesterday, the Premier even took the credit for the review of National Competition Policy that was announced by the Prime Minister. He has taken credit for initiatives not only of the Goss Government and the Borbidge Government but also the Howard Government. Earlier in the week in relation to his dodgy circular regarding the 22,000 petitioners seeking a resolution to the crisis at the Gold Coast Hospital, the Premier took credit for an initiative that was taken 10 years ago.

The fact is that this is a do nothing Government. Indeed, it is worse than a can't do Government. This Government does not know where to start. All that this Government can do and legislate for are favours for mates. Is it not significant that in the mates' rates regime of Premier Peter "Do-little", very significant issues of consequence that we have debated over the last week in particular have had to be passed through this place on the casting vote of the Speaker. That is significant, because it shows that increasingly Labor is on its own.

If the Premier was fair dinkum about jobs, we would have debated the Native Title (Queensland) State Provisions Amendment Bill so that the backlog of permits in the Department of Mines and Energy, which the Labor Party was criticising two years ago, could have been dealt with. We did not do that.

Mr MACKENROTH: I rise to a point of order. When I set the program, I set the program. The Native Title (Queensland) State Provisions Amendment Bill cannot be debated because the Federal Government cannot decide how many more amendments it wants.

Mr BORBIDGE: Yesterday the Premier stood in this place and said that he would fix native title. He has just been contradicted by the Leader of the House. That is another example of the incredible dishonesty and fibbing that we have seen from members opposite.

Mr Johnson: The Premier told me that the exploration permits were fixed up by his Government, but the opal mining industry in Queensland has closed down because of lies told to the Federal Government by this Government.

Mr BORBIDGE: The honourable member for Gregory highlights some more of the inadequacies of this Labor Government.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member is not in his correct seat.

Mr BORBIDGE: Mr Speaker, I take your point. I seem to hear an interjection from the honourable member for Gregory coming on.

Mr Johnson: The Premier told the Leader of the Opposition that the exploration permits were fixed up by his Government. But the opal mining industry in Queensland is closed down because of lies and deceit told to the Federal Government by this Government.

Mr BORBIDGE: The comments made by the honourable member for Gregory are accurate and truthful.

Mr Johnson: Eighty per cent of the industry stopped.

Mr BORBIDGE: Yes, 80% of the opal industry in the State of Queensland has ground to a halt. I would have thought that, if this Government was fair dinkum about jobs, jobs, jobs, we would have seen those elements of the legislative program getting some precedence over seedy backroom deals with trade union mates.

The Opposition opposes the adjournment of the House. Today has been a travesty of the democratic process. I know that over the years Governments on both sides have applied the gag. My Government did not do that. I would have hoped that Mr Beattie would have matched that. I think that today is a very sad and sorry day for the Parliament. The business of Queenslanders has been placed second to the business of trade unions. The unemployment figures released yesterday show that there are now 400 more Queenslanders unemployed than when the coalition came to office.

This morning the Premier made a great fuss about the number of jobs created in the first 12 months of the Beattie Government—43,100. He said the fact that 43,100 jobs had been created was a magnificent effort and testimony to his achievements and what he had been able to do in Government. He was right; those figures are accurate. However, do honourable members know how many jobs were created in the last 12 months of the coalition Government? Was it 43,100, 45,000, 48,000 or perhaps 50,000 jobs? Some 51,500 new jobs were created in the last 12 months of the coalition Government, as compared with 43,100 jobs in the first 12 months of the Beattie Government. Therefore, the coalition created 8,400 more jobs in our last 12 months than have been created in the first 12 months of the Premiership of jobs, jobs, jobs Beattie. This equates to 20% more jobs under the coalition than under

Labor over the same period. Today we have seen legislation that will do enormous damage to job creation in the State of Queensland.

This Parliament should not be going home. This Parliament should not be adjusting its legislative program to the backroom deals of Mr Beattie. This Parliament should have been sitting today and dealing with some of the other substantial business before the House, particularly that relating to the horrendous problems of land tenure and tenure for the mining industry, which are strangling economic development and jobs in Queensland today.
