



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 27 April 1999

GOVERNMENT ELECTION PROMISES

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (6 p.m): I move—

"That this House condemns the Beattie Labor Government for its broken election promise to the people of Queensland by increasing meat inspection fees, compulsory third party insurance premiums, and fire levies above the CPI."

Tonight's motion is about the detail—the devil in the detail, to take up a line that seems to have attracted the attention of the minders of the member for Brisbane Central lately. It is also about hypocrisy. It is about the political untruths with which this Government and this Premier when in Opposition sprayed the people of Queensland. It is about the web of deceit through which Labor sought office and through which it gained office. It is about saying one thing—in this instance, that it would not raise taxes or charges beyond the rate of inflation—and doing another; in fact, doing the reverse. It is about saying that its election promises—or rather its electoral bribes—were fully costed on this basis and then whacking the people of Queensland with imposts far in excess of anything it had led them to expect. All of this from a Premier who as Opposition Leader was forever telling us that he was an honourable man, that he knew what he was doing, and that he would never even think about giving commitments that he could not keep—the Brutus of Queensland politics and the man who promised faithfully, and frequently, that he would serve only Caesar, played in this particular version of the Shakespearian tragedy by the people of Queensland—and who then produced the knife that gave the lie to his solemn undertaking and used it blatantly and in company.

I wish to share with honourable members some of the highlights—or lowlights—of this Government's and this Premier's disgraceful retreat from probity. These are not from their policy documents. On their record, no-one would believe them. These are from the media. On 20 May 1997, the member for Brisbane Central was reported as stating—

"I mean, the Queensland economy has been very strong for the last 20 years and that's continuing. Stamp duty's up, so we've got an extra 110 million dollars already. Now I'm not talking about abolishing any tax, I'm simply talking about reducing some ... Now what we've got to try and do is stimulate as much of the economy as we can, particularly small business to create employment."

On 28 May that year, he was asked this question: "Part of it also though is because they won't raise taxes. Would you raise taxes?" The member for Brisbane Central replied, "We made it very clear that we wouldn't do that." On 20 May 1998 in the Courier-Mail, the member for Brisbane Central—speaking, we were asked to believe, as a 21st century leader—reportedly stated that he committed a Labor Government to delivering the land tax cuts and overall expenditure and building program outlined in the coalition's Budget. He said that Labor would even deliver building programs it believed were coalition pork-barrelling, because creating jobs outweighed politics. Then came the election, and the rot set in.

On 16 July 1998, on ABC Radio, Carolyn Tucker asked the member for Ipswich, newly the Treasurer, "No increased taxes or charges?" The Treasurer replied—

"Oh, I'm not going to go into any detail of the budget itself. That's a matter for the budget committee. But what we know is that we are up for some expenses which we didn't bargain on. We assumed that the Coalition had fully funded its programme in its budget. We found out that that's not the case and now we're going to have to look at the figures and to

work out those priorities and meld them with our priorities but one thing is certain, that we won't be running Queensland into the red."

On 17 July 1998, the Courier-Mail reported the member for Brisbane Central as follows—

"Mr Beattie had assured Mr Wellington that Labor could deliver its capital and current programme without imposing any new taxes 'or increasing existing taxes and charges above current real levels'."

On the same day in the Gold Coast Bulletin the Treasurer said—and there is absolutely no equivocation about this—

"I am ruling out any new taxes or charges in this Budget."

He was backed by his leader, Mr Beattie, in the North West Star—

"There will be no new taxes and charges."

On 30 July 1998 on ABC Radio, Carolyn Tucker pressed the point. She said, "Part of that deal was no increased or new taxes and charges, wasn't it?" The Premier replied—

"What we said was that there'd be no new taxes and charges and there'd be no increases in taxes and charges beyond real levels."

The coalition has no problems with Governments—even the shonky and faction-ridden deal opposite—dealing effectively and efficiently with revenue questions. But what we have here is case after case of blatant disregard for undertakings given solemnly—at least the member for Brisbane Central said they were given solemnly—not to sting the people with excess taxes and charges. But what do we have from these self-proclaimed paragons of virtue opposite? Compulsory third-party insurance has gone up \$40 to almost \$60—up by 25% against a Brisbane CPI increase of 1.3%—in two increases in nine months under Labor. The fire levy is up 14%—almost eleven times the CPI.

Mr Hamill interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: I did not give the commitments; members opposite did.

And that's not all. Now it seems that they really do want to offer us the steak knives as well. They have put up butchers' meat inspection fees by as much as 300%—230 times the CPI. The cheque the average butcher wrote for these services during the term of the coalition Government was \$280. Now it will be \$881. There is no justification for slugging car drivers, home owners and small butcher shops with these excess charges. What we are seeing is Labor coming out in all its usual spots—the same Labor Party that came in with such self-proclaimed promise, on gossamer wings, in 1989.

We remember that in six years the Goss Government achieved the remarkable double of closing down services across the State while sharply raising the cost to the user of those reduced services. And now we and Queenslanders have cause to reflect that the Beattie Government has learned nothing from the process-driven mechanics who ruled in that era. Although the CPI is up by 1.3%, CTP is up by 25%, the fire levy is up by 14%, and butchers' meat inspection fees are up by 300%. That cannot be justified, even though the Premier and his Ministers keep trying to justify putting their sticky fingers even deeper into the public's pocket.

It is much more than the rank hypocrisy of all this that sticks in the craw. This Government has set a course that will destroy Queensland's low tax status, and that will put at risk the vital margin by which we lead the other States in terms of living costs and the costs of doing business. Labor and the Premier prove that, when the going gets tough, Labor Governments start searching for money to pull into Treasury to fund bad management and uncoded party policies regardless of their promises. What this Government cannot understand—and this is really bad news for Queensland—is that its policies threaten the future of all sorts of things Queenslanders do and use.

There is a very substantial risk that small butchers will be sent to the wall by the Government's new meat inspection charges. But the Government does not care. There is a very real risk that increasing compulsory third-party insurance for cars will maroon the very people—the people in the outer suburbs and in the bush, the ones for whom public transport is an urban myth—who have no alternative other than to use a car for transport. The Government does not care. Through raising the fire levy, according to rumour at this stage—one we on this side of the House fear will soon be proved to be a rumour of substance and shortly thereafter a matter of fact—they will be siphoning off some of the gains to purposes other than support of the fire service.

Moreover, in terms of hypocrisy this Government's hands are dirtier than ever. It came into office promising no increases in taxes or charges beyond real inflation levels as measured by the CPI. I suggest that to most people—and I am sure most members in this place would agree—that meant no more than the current CPI. For the year to March, based on the Brisbane figure, that is 1.3%. The national figure is 1.6%. Now we see the Government trying to justify increases wildly in excess of these modest rises by citing inflation rates over 12 years and suchlike.

To its hypocrisy and broken promises can be added its arrogance. For example, take the butchers. They are being stung on the basis that, if the Government does not rob them blind, they will poison people. Only a Labor Government would attempt to justify daylight robbery by blaming the victim. The fact is that the honourable members opposite made the commitments, not honourable members on this side of the House. They have broken their word time after time.

Time expired.
