



Speech by

Hon. R. SCHWARTEN

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard 20 July 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Liberal Party Attacks on Q-Build

Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (10.01 a.m.), by leave: Recently we have seen yet another deliberate campaign of misinformation by members of the Liberal Party about Q-Build. Their latest effort was a very personal attack on the quality of the work performed by Q-Build and, by extension, the quality and competence of its staff and its contractors.

I want to examine briefly some of the specific claims made by the shadow Minister for Education and how he got it wrong. For example, he claimed that Q-Build charged Nanango State School \$616 to replace a light diffuser. That is simply not true. The facts are that the job was undertaken by a private contractor who installed 10 diffusers, with material costs alone of \$457, and undertook further work on some heaters. One must assume the member for Merrimac is accusing this contractor of ripping off the system.

The shadow Minister claimed that the same school was charged \$854 to repair a rusted water pipe. That is not true. A contractor completed this work. The actual work, detailed on the contractor's invoice, indicates that four drinking bubblers were replaced as well as the pipe being fixed. The costs of materials alone amounted to \$709.

The shadow Minister claimed that Q-Build charged Mossman State High School \$47,000 to paint the outside of a toilet block which a local tradesman offered to complete for \$9,000. Again, this is not true. Again, a private contractor completed the job. I am told the work did not involve a toilet block at all; it involved the painting of a two-storey home economics block. Apparently the shadow Minister for Education does not know the difference.

He claimed that Woree Primary School was billed \$1,422 for the internal painting of the tuckshop after local tradesmen quoted \$735 and \$860. In this particular case, Q-Build obtained one quote for this work—\$1,200— from yet again a private painting contractor in Cairns who was awarded the work. The final cost totalled \$1,422. Q-Build officers are not aware of the other quotes mentioned. The shadow Minister also claimed that Bardon State School in Brisbane was charged \$92,808 for an undercover games area for which a local builder had quoted \$58,874. In fact, this work was neither completed nor billed by Q-Build.

The Liberal Party has embarked on a deliberate campaign to label Q-Build workers as "bludgers" and "no-hopers" and has cast a slur on the character of every contractor who works for Q-Build. The shadow Education Minister has directly attacked them and the quality of their work. He has cast a slur on every one of the 2,500 people working for Q-Build, including 350 apprentices. This brutal tactic is all part of the Liberal Party's privatisation push. If the Liberal Party did not want to denigrate the standard of Q-Build work and its staff, why highlight a case such as the Coombabah State High School, where a gutter installed by Q-Build collapsed after rain? Let me tell honourable members the truth behind that story.

The replacement of the guttering was undertaken by Q-Build apprentices. The contractor who originally built the school—not Q-Build—had fastened the gutter brackets onto a fibro fascia board with pop rivets. Imagine doing that! Anybody who knows anything about building knows not to do that. The apprentices in good faith reinstalled the brackets using masonry screws, which were not sufficient to hold the guttering once it filled with rain. The guttering did collapse—no wonder! But Q-Build responded

the same day and the work was rectified at no cost to the client. Rectification included the provision of timber framing behind the fascia, which should have been done in the first place, to hold the gutter brackets—something the private contractor who built it should have done.

The shadow Minister for Education has mounted a brutal attack on Q-Build standards and the skills of its staff. The fact he has been proved wrong shows he has not done his homework. But there is a much wider issue at stake in all of this besides one shadow Minister's incompetence. It is clear that the economic rationalists in the Liberal Party are firmly in charge of the coalition's economic policy. I would be interested to hear from members of the National Party whether they support plans to withdraw Q-Build staff from more than 40 centres throughout the State.

I am sure the member for Warrego has a view about the Q-Build jobs in Charleville. So too would the member for Western Downs when it comes to Roma. National Party members on the Gold Coast, including the Opposition Leader himself, would no doubt have a position on the future of 120 Q-Build jobs in that region.

Q-Build makes a significant contribution to regional communities—

more than \$75m in wages a year, with \$40m of it going into rural and regional centres;

more than 1,000 of its 2,500 staff are located in rural and regional centres; and

annual expenditure on goods and services worth almost \$245m across the State, with more than \$140m spent in rural and regional areas.

Perhaps it is time we heard from National Party members about whether they support the economic rationalists in the Liberal Party and their privatisation plans. I now table a list of some 65 letters of support for Q-Build which have come from its clients.
