



Speech by

**Hon. R. SCHWARTEN**

**MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON**

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Hansard 21 July 1999

### **SCHOOL UNIFORM BILL**

**Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (10.55 p.m.): Members on this side of the Parliament would not find much on which to take Opposition members to task because all we have heard tonight is a statement about whether or not having uniforms in schools is a reasonable attitude for people to take. Any sensible person believes that that is the case. One of my children goes to primary school and has a uniform. The local secondary school has a voluntary uniform system. Guess what? All the students opt to wear some form of uniform. I do not believe any person would take umbrage when it comes to uniforms.

It comes down to a question of whether or not the principal has the power to enforce the uniform standard. The reality is that, under the arrangements being proposed by this Bill, that is what will happen. The "anti Q-Build" shadow Minister—the "anti school clean up" shadow Minister—is proposing a sledgehammer policy which says, "Thou shalt."

**Mr Lucas:** The only uniform he wears is the emperor's new clothes.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** Then I am glad I am not looking. Obviously the shadow Minister has a bit of a problem there. The Minister for Sport would be concerned about people not wearing uniforms.

The reality is that the shadow Minister is proposing a system to bind schools. I do not believe that this needs to happen. Less than two years ago in this place the shadow Minister was advocating a responsible partnership between principals and school communities. Now he is saying, "Let's vest all the power in principals." I wonder what it is that has motivated him to do this at this point in time but which did not motivate him to do it when he was Minister.

We can talk about the Ombudsman's report but, for heaven's sake, everybody knows that this has been an issue in schools for the past 30 years. It is nothing new. We did not need the Ombudsman to tell us that this was a point of contention. When the shadow Minister was Minister he knew that this was the case. The belief is that if we enshrine this in law it will stop anybody taking the matter to court. I have never heard such mumbo-jumbo in my life.

We had a law in this State which permitted corporal punishment and allowed people to be executed. Time after time that law was tested in the courts. Why was it tested? It was tested because it was a law and it was capable of being tested in any court in the land. The assumption that a principal could say, "You will wear that", and that somebody would not take the matter to court is a nonsense. It shows the ignorance of the laws of this land of the people who sit opposite. It is no wonder that the former Minister for Education managed to get our education system into such a shambles. He believes that we could make a law and no-one would ever test it. He says, "Let's make a law that everyone will wear a uniform and no-one will test it." What a nonsense. What an absurd suggestion to make.

What does it mean for the school principal who says, "I do not want to accept this standard of behaviour in my school"? The member who introduced this Bill used to lecture members of this House about the very solid school community that represented the views of the community. When a school community made a decision under this Bill—if it were to become law—it would have the backing of the Crown. It would have the basis of law. When a principal says, "No, you can't turn up in that sort of outfit," he or she would make that position known to the student and to the parents. When a parent challenged that decision it would amount to a challenge of this place and of the laws that we make.

That principal would have the backing of this Parliament and the backing of every facility that is available to every other public servant making similar decisions under the law.

So what is the fuss about? It is about this shadow Minister, the anti Q-Build Minister, who wants to get rid of day labour. He tried to do it when he was Minister.

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