



Speech by

Hon. R. SCHWARTEN

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard 27 October 1999

**APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee C
Report**

Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (4.34 p.m.): In rising in this debate, I want to point out that asking the shadow Minister over there to talk about public housing is a bit like asking a cane toad to comment on beauty. The reality is that he is the least qualified person in this place to be talking about it after his display of arrogance yet again this afternoon in misleading this place and in terms of his snobbery and insistence that we still need—

Mr LAMING: I rise to a point of order. I find that remark offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I do not know which one it was, but I withdraw it. The reality is that this shadow Minister has displayed exactly the same sort of mentality when it comes to public housing that his predecessors did, that is, that in order to gain a place on the waiting list, a person has to turn up to the local area office with a reference. I said at the Estimates—and I will say it again today—that that will never ever happen while I am the Minister.

I encourage him to go out to some of these area offices, talk to some of the staff and see just how complicated that procedure was. They did not like doing it. There are a couple who support it. But, as I said, the majority of people out there in the area offices do not support that sort of snobbery. I do not think anybody in this place with any decency does, either. I note that he is the only one who sat on that committee who supported that view, and as such he stands condemned.

Let me talk about one of his other pet hates, Q-Build. Everybody knows that he has it in for Q-Build. There is no doubt about that. He wakes up every morning hoping that he can find out some project in which Q-Build did not do as well as it might. He never, ever—not once—got up here to the defence of Q-Build. He stands condemned on that. When we talk about Q-Build doing the maintenance work, it was not this Government that did that; that was started under his Government. The amalgamation of the day labour work forces of Q-Build and Housing happened under his Government, and it was a shambles. There is no doubt about that.

Here is an instance for the shadow Minister to ponder on. A recent example occurred on Monday, 18 October, when several accommodation units were damaged as a result of an explosion. The first call was recorded at the after hours maintenance communications services at 4.56 a.m., with Q-Build tradespeople out on site at 5.49 a.m. These are the people on whom he is crooked. These are the people whom he continually berates around this Chamber, and he has never once stood up in their defence. As far as I am concerned, the job that they do out there is very, very good. With the recent synergies we have been able to establish between Housing and Public Works, it will work even better.

I do not know where his logic comes from in terms of the untenable housing. Obviously his policy is to put people into hovels, to put people into untenable houses. That is not my policy. The disgrace he made of himself down there in the electorate of the member for Lytton was just shameful. The truth is that the shadow Minister wants people to live in those sorts of places when they are untenable. I wonder if that is the Liberal Party policy—or perhaps it has not got one.

Mr LAMING: I rise to a point of order. That remark is untrue and offensive and I ask it to be withdrawn.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I do not know if it was untrue, but I will withdraw it, anyway. The fact of the matter is that he did stand in front of a house that was untenable and make this great statement: there will always be a waiting list. Yet he gets up in here and makes the sort of comments that he did this afternoon to indicate that he would cure the waiting list by getting people to live in hovels. That is not the policy of this Government.

The other point about the zones is that they simply did not work. I noticed his comment about there being no consultation. That was an election promise of ours. There was no consultation when the former Minister brought in those reforms, as he called them—none whatsoever. They arrived by fax on a Monday morning and he stopped the waiting lists for two weeks while he put them in place. There was no consultation with the area offices, no consultation with tenants and no consultations with the peak bodies in this State. That is how it was done, yet the shadow Minister says that there was no consultation from me!

There was consultation with Shelter and with every other peak body in this State that condemned the decision of the former Government to make people live away from their loved ones and away from their support services. It was an absolute nightmare to deal with. That shows how much the honourable member knows about—

Time expired.
