



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

Hansard 17 August 1999

INTERACTIVE GAMBLING (PLAYER PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (9 p.m.): I believe that the Opposition Leader has set out very clearly why this legislation is a stunt on the part of the Premier and the acting Treasurer and why it does not deserve the support of this House. He has outlined the trail of actions by the Premier which establishes that this Bill is anything but an attempt by the Premier to do the right thing, that is, an attempt by the Premier to do the right thing by the Premier and by his good colleague and long-term friend the member for Ipswich, who is involved in this net bet affair every bit as much as the Premier.

I do not want to repeat what has already been said. However, as my name has been taken in vain during this debate, I would like the opportunity to respond. Much of what has been said is totally wrong, yet I know—

Mr Hamill: Are you going to stand aside now, are you?

Mr COOPER: That is why the member is sitting there.

Mr Hamill: That's why you're sitting over there, pal.

Mr COOPER: There is a lot more to be said, too. The member has probably been on the meths all night. That is no doubt what you would do.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! The member will direct his remarks through the Chair.

Mr COOPER: I do not mind him, but let us keep it fair. Do not worry.

As for the issue of my name having been taken in vain, I believe that this provides me with an opportunity to lay a few cards on the table and to witness the difference, if you like, between members on this side of the Chamber and Government members and whether or not they can take the heat of the blowtorch on their bellies. I have been through that with the Carruthers inquiry. I endured 10 months of the blowtorch from the Labor Lawyers on that side of the House working in close collusion with the Labor Lawyers in the CJC. They conjured up that person from Sydney—poor old Carruthers—who was put in the hot seat, and away they went on what was nothing other than a politically motivated witch-hunt. That is exactly what it was, and that is exactly what it was proven to be. Cedric Hampson, QC, of the CJC had already provided an opinion, which was allowed to lie in a safe for 10 solid months, that Cooper and Borbidge had no case to answer. We found that out in December 1996, yet that process started in about April 1996. That was absolutely disgraceful. However, I will say this in defence of myself. Not once did I complain. I did take it on the belly. A few members on the other side of the House could do likewise, but only a few. They are squealing now. The member for Bundamba and the member for Chatsworth are two members who could probably cop it, but not many others could.

I have every bit of respect for the wife of the Premier, Mrs Heather Beattie, and so does my wife, Penny. We know each other and like each other a lot. But one thing I would never have done was bring my wife into this Chamber and ask her to hold my hand. In fact, I know that she would not have done that. She would have told me to get nicked; that I am big enough and ugly enough to stand on my own two feet and look after myself. And I know darned well that I could do that.

Mr Nuttall: That's a cheap shot.

Mr COOPER: It is not a cheap shot at all. My wife came in for a bit of criticism when, with great reluctance, she came to the court of Carruthers in South Brisbane in that special building they made up for themselves at massive cost to the taxpayer for something that was nothing other than a cheap political shot, if you like. We endured 10 months of cheap political shots, but it was not cheap for the taxpayer. It was an absolute disgrace.

I remember my wife sitting in the back of the court. She was actually doing the crossword in the newspaper because she found it so boring. That old fellow was so weary, but at one stage he looked up and saw her doing the crossword or reading the paper and he sent the attendant down the back to see what this woman was doing down there. This woman happened to be doing a crossword, and she was asked to leave the court because she should not be doing a crossword in his courtroom. So naturally she took the paper, walked outside and finished it off outside. That is what she thought of his court and that farcical charade.

We had to put up with so many things at that time, but we came through. And guess who is still standing and who is not. We also know that the Labor Lawyers and former Labor Lawyers of the Labor Lawyers Association—and members opposite know them as well as I do—are still there. I want to see a fair inquiry into this issue that is fair to everyone, not just a one-sided political witch-hunt. We do not want to see that. We have seen all that. We want to see something that is fair, not a politically invented case. I believe that this case should be answered, and it can be if members opposite have the will to do it. But if they do not, and if they just want to bury it, cover it up, put it down and make sure that the truth does not come out, then it will eat them up and rot them away. It will demonstrate quite clearly that they are corrupt and that they do have something to hide.

Mr Hamill: Ha, ha!

Mr COOPER: This is not a laughing matter. The member for Ipswich is laughing about all of this. He thinks that it is one hell of a joke, but it is not a joke. It is something—

Mr HAMILL: I rise to a point of order. I do not find this matter a joke. I ask the honourable member to withdraw that statement. However, I do find his comments something of a joke.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! The member has been asked to withdraw.

Mr COOPER: I will withdraw. But quite obviously, the member must have been laughing at something else, because everyone saw that he was laughing. What I am saying is no joke. I am talking about the absolute reality. I know that, because I went through it at your instigation.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Crows Nest to speak through the Chair.

Mr COOPER: I will continue talking to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I will just remember that they are chatting in the background. Is that okay? I know that there is one rule for them and one rule for me.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member is not reflecting on the Chair, is he?

Mr COOPER: No, no way! I believe that it is necessary to put some of these instances, if you like, on the table because they have happened. Now we have another instance, and we will see whether the Government can withstand the same sort of scrutiny as we did. We handled it all the way through, even though it took 10 months and about \$5m to do it. As I said, it was an absolute disgrace.

We all know that we face pressure in this place and in our jobs as parliamentarians. We all know that lobbying occurs, and so it should. That is a healthy part of democracy. But when it comes to something such as this, or the need for an inquiry of some sort—and heaven knows we get plenty of inquiries—from time to time we do have to be able to face the music. It is going to be interesting to see whether Government members can face the music as we faced it—and faced it down—because we knew that it was nothing other than a political witch-hunt of the worst kind. The zealots and megalomaniacs like Mark Le Grand were leading the charge. We knew very well what their game was. Their game plan was to bring down the Government of the day for no other reason—no other need—than to bring down the Government of the day. They stand condemned, and I wanted the chance to be able to say that out aloud. I do believe—and I want to believe—that the people in charge at the CJC, including Brendan Butler, Bob Gotterson and the other people who now have the responsibility of taking this matter in hand, have the intestinal fortitude to see this matter through and to do so aboveboard, with fairness and in the public interest so that we have no more of the political witch-hunts that I had to endure and so that justice is seen to be done. That is all I am asking.

This issue must be resolved, but it will not be resolved if it is covered up and if it is said that there is no case to answer. There is a case to answer, and this inquiry must be undertaken clearly, openly and fairly and in the public interest so that the public can see that there is not one law for Government members and one for the rest of us. That is my memory of what occurred in 1996 and I will not forget it. This is the time for those opposite to prove themselves and see how they go with the torch on their bellies.

Mr Hamill: Why didn't you stand aside?

Mr COOPER: Obviously, the member for Ipswich has a problem. He has a guilty conscience.

Mr HAMILL: I rise to a point of order. I find that remark offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn. All I asked was why the honourable member did not stand aside when the CJC was inquiring into him.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr COOPER: As usual, I will withdraw. The member for Ipswich and the member for Brisbane Central are as guilty as sin. They have a problem—

Mr HAMILL: I rise to a point of order. That comment is offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr COOPER: I withdraw. He is a very sensitive petal. As far as I am concerned, we have to ensure that we have a fair and open inquiry. The inquiry must be public and must be on the record so that witnesses can be called. In that way, we will be able to take the scab from the top of this scandal and ensure that all the poison and the mud comes out.

If those opposite are on their mettle and want to be holier than thou and as pure as the driven snow, we will see if they can stand the test. I do not believe that they will. Those opposite will say, "Oh, yes, I will answer all the questions", "Yes, we will have every inquiry" and "Yes, we will cooperate in every way, shape and form." However, they are just words. The Opposition will be waiting and watching. The boot is now on the other foot.

In 1996, the Labor lawyers were in collusion with the CJC. I was on that side of the House and the member for Kedron was over here. In April 1996, I recall the member for Kedron interjecting and saying, "We will get you by December." I remember Mark Le Grand saying, "We will get him with the death of a thousand cuts—the drip, drip, drip of the media, but we will get him." Well, guess who is still here and guess who has gone! As far as I am concerned, honesty won through on that occasion.

The only thing that came out of that disgraceful debacle was 1,000 hours of tape recording. The parents of an innocent person in north Queensland had their home bugged but the only thing the tapes showed was the fact that this fellow passed wind. It was fairly loud and it woke the judge. He looked around, wondering who on earth had done this thing. That is all that ever came out of that inquiry and that person was acquitted. I had my name dragged through the mud by those opposite. It is nice to be able to put the truth on the record.

Earlier today the Premier gave the names of coalition members who supposedly knew about this application for a licence. I daresay a lot of people knew about it because there was no secret about it. Members of Parliament are allowed to lobby in the public interest. The question before this Parliament is what happened with regard to that licence. I daresay the member for Ipswich will answer that question when his time comes after a full and open public inquiry. After such an inquiry we may hear the truth as to why the application for a licence was granted.

There is no real witch-hunt as far as Mr D'Arcy, the member for Woodridge, is concerned. What is at stake is the integrity, the credibility, the honesty and the openness of this Labor Government. That is why the nervousness is present in those opposite and why the guilty signs are coming through. That is why those opposite cannot stand on their own feet and handle this situation. They are running scared. One can tell from the body language. Of course, there is one rule for those opposite and another rule for us.

One annoying aspect of this matter is the Premier's holier than thou attitude and his reaction to the Courier-Mail. From the Premier we have denials, then acceptance, then back into denials, and then further acceptance. We see this endless backflipping from the Premier. It is patently obvious that this Government is tainted and corrupt. The Labor Government cannot bear that because it has always painted itself as holier than thou and as pure as the driven snow with everything above board. Yet the accelerator is down as far as cronyism is concerned. We have never seen cronyism to this extent in this State. What has occurred in the electricity commission and other boards is simply beyond belief.

I want to mention a couple of further things in examining the performance of the stood aside Treasurer. The first thing to consider is whether there is anything in his behaviour which might indicate that he was receptive to the request from the Premier for urgent attention to Mr D'Arcy's concerns. That question is unanswered. This morning in this Parliament we heard a lot of questions directed at the Premier. As he has said on other occasions, he is quite happy to take all questions and does not want anything held back. Not one of the questions asked this morning was answered openly and honestly. All we saw was the Premier ducking behind the fact that this matter is before the Auditor-General and the CJC. At this stage we do not have a full-blown inquiry, but we must have such an inquiry if we are going to get to the truth of this matter.

Mr Littleproud: Then he swore at an officer of this House.

Mr COOPER: I was just coming to that point because one can always tell when a person is rattled and is as guilty as sin. Such persons blame everyone else but themselves. The Premier walked away from the member for Ipswich as quickly as he possibly could. He walked away from the member for Woodridge as quickly as he possibly could. The Premier will keep on walking away from anyone and

everyone and will keep on dumping them as long as he possibly can. There will be broken wheels and axles and everything left down on the flat. Anyone could see it coming a mile away. When the Premier could not find a few papers, the first thing he did was blame the Clerk of the Parliament and swear at him. That is the sign of a guilty man—a man who is absolutely rattled. The Premier comes across with all the smiles and all the body language in an attempt to give the public the impression that everything is okay underneath. We know that that is not so.

That is why it is so important that there is a full judicial inquiry into this matter. An inquiry will allow the public to judge for themselves because that is what they are going to do at the next election. If the public feels that their grievances have not been addressed they are going to vote accordingly and those opposite know where they will end up. There is no question about it. The people will do the rest. Therefore I say that the CJC and the Auditor-General must be allowed to do their job and then the people will have their day in court.

The memorandum from the Premier's office to the Treasurer's office obviously reached its destination and the Treasurer's office must therefore be the prime suspect for having sent it to the Office of Gaming Regulation. We know where it ended up.

As far as I am concerned, it has all been said. Members on both sides of the House will have more to say on this issue. Let us not forget that the central issue here is that we have a problem. Whoever is in Government— and it happens to be the Labor Party at this time—has a problem. The public and the media are watching this situation very closely to see how those opposite handle things in difficult times. It is all very well to smile when one is winning and when one is on top. It is hardest when the blowtorch comes on the belly. The blowtorch is on the belly of the Labor Party now. We have seen too much squealing and too much of this jocularly from those opposite. They believe that there is nothing to worry about.

History is judging the members opposite now in terms of how well they handle this particular situation. It is a bad one for them. Somehow, some way they have to handle it so that they can retain some credibility. Right now, from the way it is going, it does not look very good for the members opposite. As I say, I think that we on this side of the House set a pretty good example, because we came through a long, vicious and brutal inquiry.

Time expired.
