



Speech by

Mr SANTO SANTORO

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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INTERACTIVE GAMBLING (PLAYER PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SANTORO (Clayfield—LP) (9.31 p.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am glad that you are so observant, because I have the flu and I had thought of taking my name off the list and giving the House a break. However, the contributions of members opposite have prompted me to brave my rather dilapidated condition this evening and make a contribution to the debate.

I am absolutely amazed at the indignation that is being expressed by honourable members opposite over the fact that we are raising, in the Parliament and the media, issues relating to the net bet affair. I am absolutely amazed at the indignation that they are showing. Just as the honourable member for Crows Nest and others have done, I ask honourable members to remember the standards that the Government set in Opposition and the great number of times that Labor Party members called members on this side of the House "corrupt" and "crooked". In fact, at one stage one member opposite even called us "murderers". The bile and the vileness that they poured upon us was amazing.

I ask honourable members to remember the Carruthers inquiry, which was a politically instigated witch-hunt by Labor lawyers that sought to crucify two members of the then coalition Government, the then Premier and the then Police Minister. Something that has not been stated in the debate so far but which is worthwhile reminding honourable members opposite of is that, at the end of the whole sad and sorry process of the Carruthers inquiry, the honourable member for Surfers Paradise and the honourable member for Crows Nest were exonerated. It is important for members to remember who exonerated them—the Chairman of the Criminal Justice Commission, Mr Butler, and the person who is conducting an independent investigation into the Internet affair, Mr Gotterson. Those two people cleared the honourable member for

Surfers Paradise and the honourable member for Crows Nest. Despite the fact that the Government is placing its faith in those very people to resolve this issue in their favour, they are still dragging the names of the honourable member for Surfers Paradise and the honourable member for Crows Nest through the mud. The independent umpire of yesterday is the independent umpire of today. Members on the other side of the House exhort us to accept the decision of the independent umpires, the umpires being Mr Butler and Mr Gotterson, who were the independent umpires who cleared Mr Borbidge and Mr Cooper. They are a pack of hypocrites. During this debate they have again displayed themselves as the political cowards that they are, as they drag the names of two innocent men through the mud.

During the debate I was reminded of how the name of a former Liberal Party President, Mr Bob Carroll, was dragged through the mud because he won, fairly and squarely, a small Government contract. They did not refer him to the CJC or the Auditor-General. I have not heard the Honourable Minister for my former department or the Government come out and throw mud at Mr Carroll in relation to that contract, because there was no mud to throw. In that case, unlike the process that we are debating here, that process was fair and square. They simply went after an innocent man who had gone through the proper and clear process. He had won a small Government contract that certainly would not have made him \$20m richer. Members opposite crucified people like that.

Members opposite come into this House and expect us to walk away from Ipswich Inc. and Labor Unity Inc. They want us to walk away from the fact that what the Labor Party is practising today is what it has been practising since the turn of the century, that is, institutionalised corruption. That is what this is about. If any members

opposite seriously expect us to believe that the Premier, the Treasurer who has stood aside and other members of Cabinet did not know that Livingstone, Pisasale, Hamill and God knows who else who has not yet been named—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member will refer to people by their electorates.

Mr SANTORO: Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker. I meant to say "the honourable member for Ipswich and Livingstone and Pisasale", the last two of whom are not members of this place. If members opposite expect us to walk away from something that absolutely smells, they have another thing coming.

This is not a matter of getting even or squaring up. This is a matter of juxtaposing our behaviour when in Government with the behaviour of the current Government, despite the fact that Mr Butler and Mr Gotterson—who are now standing in judgment over the Government—cleared the names of Mr Borbidge and Mr Cooper. Members opposite have no right to come into this place and drag the names of innocent men through the mud again, because the two men who will judge them have judged Mr Borbidge and Mr Cooper to be not guilty. I say to members opposite that they are going to have to sit there and cop it. I do not believe for a minute that they are equal to the men and women on this side of the House, who came through a very trying period much better than any member opposite ever could.

The key questions are: why are we considering a Bill such as this tonight. Is there any necessity for this Bill, particularly when we have heard the Premier over the past two or three weeks on radio and today in this place say things such as: "The Treasurer and I have done nothing wrong. We have nothing to hide. We have acted with propriety since the issue blew up in the media. We have referred everything to the Auditor-General. We have asked the key players to stand aside." A few days ago the Premier was saying, "The legislation is not necessary." So why are we considering this legislation? It is not for the reasons that honourable members opposite have stated. The real reasons are contained within the Premier's second-reading speech. It is worth reminding the House of what the Premier said here earlier today. He said—

"At this point in time, Navari remains a shareholder in Gocorp, but, on the basis of the information provided to the Queensland Office of Gaming Regulation, Messrs D'Arcy and Livingstone and Councillor Pisasale hold no interest in the company. Despite this progress—and I stress that, on the basis of the information available to the Queensland Office of Gaming Regulation, the D'Arcy, Livingstone and Pisasale interests"—

I notice Mr Deputy Speaker that the Premier did not refer to honourable members by their electorates.

"... no longer hold any beneficial interest in Gocorp—the Government has resolved to proceed with this legislation."

He said—and this is worth while listening to—

"There are two prime reasons for this. Firstly, it is critically important to ensure absolutely and completely that the ties between this group and Gocorp are completely and utterly severed now and for all time."

He does not trust them to listen to him when he says, "Sever your ties." He has to bring legislation into this place to ensure that his mates sever their ties. He has to bring in this legislation to make sure that his mates are honest. I laughed when honourable members opposite said that he is bringing this legislation in here to make all members of Parliament honest. They were the dishonest ones who acted corruptly. It is members of his own Cabinet and party who cannot be trusted. Honourable members should continue to listen to this. He said—

"Secondly, the Government's intention is wider than simply ensuring that public officials are never again exposed to the temptation to place private gain above public duty in regard to interactive gambling licences."

He is talking about his Labor mates inside and outside of Government. I will again quote from the Premier's speech, because he goes on to be even more damning. I would hate to have a friend like the Premier if I were on the sticky wicket that the former Treasurer is on. He stated—

"These amendments are a most unusual step in legislation. They could be described as draconian. However, they clearly illustrate the Government's determination to ensure that inappropriate people do not remain involved in this company."

He went on to say—

"I cannot accept, and neither can the public of Queensland, a situation where there is any chance for these people to sneak in through a back door and profit"—

The Treasurer's, the Government's and Labor Inc's back door—that is the back door that the Premier was talking about. Yet members opposite have the hide to come in here and say that we need to have this legislation so that we can uphold and entrench good standards in this Parliament.

It is absolutely corrupt as a point of parliamentary debate and an insult to the intelligence of everybody in this place for the Premier to come in here and suggest that members on this side of the House need this legislation when the major reason that it is before

us is that it is a cover-up. The Premier thinks that the media will be fooled into thinking that somewhere along the line standards will be restored. The only way that standards will be restored in this Parliament and in public life is through an individual and corporate determination by every member in here to do the right thing. The Treasurer of this State and people associated with the Labor Party, including members in this Parliament, did not do the right thing. That is the reason we see this legislation before us tonight.

The Opposition does not like this Bill. It opposes the vast majority of the provisions in it, because it is a bad Bill. Honourable members opposite have tried to suggest that it is a good Bill, but it is a bad Bill because it is being rushed. It has not been subjected to review by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee. As honourable members opposite have said, it is unnecessary because the existing Act covers all of the options that this Bill is seeking to enhance and introduce. As a public relations stunt, it is absolutely necessary, because the Premier realises that his mates cannot be trusted and that there is a grave danger of their going down the same path again. Not only does he have to crack the whip; he also has to put them in chains, because if he does not do so they will escape and do the wrong thing again. He is trying to put them in a straightjacket.

Apart from that, the legislation is too broad. It disqualifies MLAs and councillors and their families. The question that needs to be asked is: where do we draw the line? Why not include political parties? Why limit it to Internet gambling? This is a crazy, knee-jerk, panicked and nonsensical reaction. In a parliamentary sense, some people would say that it is absolutely corrupt and has little regard for democratic practice in this place. As the honourable member for Warwick said—and I listened to him very carefully because, unlike most of the speakers opposite, he made sense—we did not even have 14 seconds to consider this Bill. We could not seek an opinion on it and consider it in detail ourselves. The pious mob opposite speak about lifting parliamentary standards and bringing in a great new era of parliamentary scrutiny and accountability, yet in the dead of night, 14 seconds after the Bill was introduced, we are considering legislation that has been brought in to protect Labor mates by trying to hoodwink the media and the public of Queensland. It will not stack up. However, the Government will have the numbers, which will be enhanced by the vote of the honourable member for Woodridge. One would have to wonder why the member would be voting on a Bill such as this one.

Mr Cooper: They have used his vote, and they will cut his throat and they will cut his head off.

Mr SANTORO: That is obvious. The honourable member for Crows Nest is right. In some ways, we have to feel sorry for the honourable member for Woodridge. What we have been seeing over the past three weeks is a feeding frenzy on behalf of the Premier and his mates at the expense of the honourable member for Woodridge that has rarely been witnessed in the political history of Queensland. He has been made to be the fall guy. The member whom they have been trying to protect is the Minister. It is the Minister to whom I wish to turn my attention.

The first point that cannot be fobbed off about the Minister's role is that the Minister has to make the decision. Many other members have spoken at length, so I will limit my remarks in relation to the role of the Treasurer. He can and should consider—as he said he did—departmental advice. But, at the end of the day, it is the Treasurer who makes the decision and signs off. Any suggestion that the then Treasurer was somehow compelled to follow the Treasury advice, whatever that may have been, and could not reach his own conclusion would itself render his decision very much open to question. The Treasurer was required to have regard to many matters before deciding whether that applicant for the Internet licence was suitable. Other members in this place have gone through this matter. All I can suggest is that there are very good grounds—if the Treasurer had been doing his job properly and been scrutinising his advice and the documents put before him—for concluding that the original decision to grant this licence under section 32 of the Act was most objectionable and possibly null and void.

Mr Borbidge: The former Treasurer spent all of his time blaming the Public Service.

Mr SANTORO: That is despicable. Over the 10 years that I have been in this place and over the 23 years that I have been an active observer of political affairs in this State, everyone has said how reputable and how full of integrity and expertise the Queensland Treasury and its officials are and how absolutely trusting we have been of their advice. Governments from both sides, whether they are Liberal/National coalition or Labor, have always stood by the integrity of the Queensland Treasury. In my 23 years of involvement in politics in this State, this was the first time that I have seen two of the top officials within Treasury crucified by a Treasurer. As the Honourable Leader of the Opposition said, that is a despicable act of political cowardice and it cannot be allowed to go unmentioned in this or any other debate involving Treasury in the future.

Then there is the Premier's role in all of this. It does not matter how much members opposite try to camouflage the point. The point is that the Treasurer is responsible for considering—and the legislation requires him to do this—the applicant's character or business reputation and whether the applicant's current financial position and

background is suitable. He is obliged by the legislation to discharge his responsibilities in terms of proper scrutiny. He did not do it, and that is the reason why this issue has blown up and why we are debating this tonight.

The Premier says—

"I took the Crown Solicitor's advice and"—

ignoring section 59 of the Act in particular—

"if we had not come in here, we would be subject to litigation. There could be action against the Government if we forced the cancellation of this licence."

There is always risk of litigation, and this particular issue is not devoid of the possibility of litigation.

Mr Borbidge: He didn't table the full advice.

Mr SANTORO: Absolutely. That is right, he did not table the full advice.

Mr Borbidge: He didn't table any legal advice on this Bill.

Mr SANTORO: Yes, he did not table any legal advice on this Bill and he also did not, in fact, tell us what briefing he gave the Crown Solicitor when he asked for the advice.

Mr Borbidge: We got two lines of a 15-page briefing.

Mr SANTORO: We got two lines of a 15-page briefing.

How can we trust the Premier? As much as we want to like and trust the Premier and his Government, I just do not believe we can, because the advice that he refuses to table is just not worth two bits. What were the facts applying to the Crown Solicitor? Was he briefed that Councillor Pisasale did not disclose his criminal history? Was he briefed about the criminal history of Mr Austin? Was he aware of the various misleading, inappropriate corporate restructurings that occurred? I could go on asking all the questions which I know and I hope the Criminal Justice Commission, Mr Gotterson and the Auditor-General will ask in terms of the advice that was sought from the Crown Solicitor.

So there you have it. What we have heard tonight is a pack of hypocrites again trying to muddy the waters by dragging through the political mud the names of people such as the honourable member for Crows Nest and the honourable member for Surfers Paradise who were cleared by the judges who have now been entrusted with the responsibility of clearing the current Government. What we have here is a massive cover-up, I believe, of real political corruption. It does not matter how the Premier tries to paint it or how he tries to dress up this Bill, it is just a lame excuse for a Bill that seeks to protect and look after Labor mates who have indulged in some of the grossest examples of political cronyism ever seen in this State.
