



Speech by

Mr SANTO SANTORO

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Hansard 25 August 1999

SES POSITIONS, MERIT SELECTION

Mr SANTORO (Clayfield—LP) (6 p.m.): I move—

"That this House expresses grave concern at the Beattie Labor Government's approach to public administration and calls on the Government to:

- (a) ensure that all future vacancies in chief executive positions are publicly advertised, the candidates evaluated by an independent selection panel and appointments made on merit and equity;
- (b) ensure that all SES positions are filled on merit and equity; and
- (c) stop filling important public sector entities with its mates."

Over the past couple of months, it has given the Opposition no pleasure whatsoever to raise concerns relating to cronyism as practised by the Beattie Labor Government. One of the most astounding responses that a Government can come up with is the indignation that has been expressed by the Beattie Labor Government when the coalition has raised these issues of blatant, rampant cronyism. I suggest to honourable members opposite that it is a hypocritical and absolutely amazing attitude to adopt, particularly when we consider that it is absolutely undeniable that cronyism within the State of Queensland has reached epidemic proportions under the Beattie Labor Government, and particularly when we consider the attitude of members of the Beattie Labor Government when they were in Opposition a year or so ago.

All we have to do is briefly—not comprehensively—go to the Hansard record of what people such as Mr Beattie had to say. On 30 April 1996, Mr Beattie said—

"They looked after their mates; that is what it is all about; snouts in the trough and looking after their mates...They are prepared to look after their mates financially in more ways than one, yet they cry poor."

On 12 September 1996, the Deputy Premier said—

"The Labor Party learnt some painful lessons during the last State election, and we learnt them well. This Government has learnt nothing from six years in Opposition. It is still the same. It has not changed. It is still up to its old tricks, still up to the same old cronyism, still up to the same old contempt for ordinary Queenslanders."

What I would like to respectfully suggest to honourable members, and, in particular, to the Premier and the Deputy Premier who made those utterances in this place, is that they have learnt nothing at all from their almost three years in Opposition or from their performance during six years of Goss Labor Government when the practice of cronyism was refined to a point that brought shame on this Parliament, on the state of public administration in Queensland and on the State as a whole. All I can say is that the Beattie Labor Government has learnt nothing from the experiences of the Goss Labor Government.

When those opposite were in Government they precipitated scurrilous, defamatory, and unjustified statements on perfectly innocent and meritorious coalition Government appointments. When someone who was perhaps connected with the Liberal Party won a contract, or won a position based on merit, or won a tender as a result of fair and open tendering processes, they were criticised. We now have honourable members opposite making appointments which can only be described as blatant cronyism. They expect the coalition to sit silent and to witness, without any

comment whatsoever, the litany of appointments of cronies and the corruption of the appointment processes to the Public Service and to public sector positions. I have news for members opposite, and that is that we will not be silenced.

Yesterday, I tabled a list of appointments by the Beattie Labor Government with Labor, union and other Labor partisan connections. It contained the details of almost 60 people with Labor, union or Labor partisan connections to various Government entities. This was an authoritative, lengthy and very damning list of cronies containing all sorts of Labor-connected people on it, including—and honourable members should listen to these descriptions of cronies—former ALP presidents, union presidents, union vice-presidents, other assorted union officials, Labor Party Treasurers, Labor Party MLAs, ALP candidates, ALP former candidates, ALP city councillors, ALP mayors, Labor lawyers, former Federal Labor Ministers, Labor Party campaign directors, and wives and husbands of all of the above, and the list can go on and on and on, and undoubtedly during the life of this Government the list will go on and on and on. We will continue to table those lists for the information and gratification of members opposite. What a list! What a rogues gallery of ALP hacks, hangers-on and cronies!

Obviously, the Government has sprung to its own defence and the defences have taken on several forms. Those opposite say that Labor has appointed former coalition politicians. They further say that the coalition Government did the same. They also say that some ALP appointees have severed their ties to the Labor Party and the union movement prior to or after their appointments. Let us have a look at each of these defences as proffered by the Labor Party members opposite.

First of all, let us have a look at the allegation that Labor has appointed former coalition politicians. I challenge speakers opposite to produce a list of those people. Who are they? How many of them are there? I challenge them to produce the list, and to produce it today. They will not come up with a list that is as extensive as the one that I tabled in the Parliament yesterday, and they will not come up with lists in the future that will rival the lists that I will continue to table in this place week after week and month after month.

When the Premier—whom I see has joined the debate—says, "We have appointed your people", I challenge him to produce a list and make it as extensive as the one that I tabled yesterday.

Those opposite also say that the coalition, when in Government, did the same. Let us talk about the previous coalition Government—the Borbidge/Sheldon Government—not the Bjelke-Petersen Government or any other Government. It is the last Government that we are comparing.

Let us not go into ancient history, as those opposite undoubtedly will do. Do those coalition appointments contain party presidents, Premiers, Treasurers, Deputy Premiers, union presidents and all the other litany of Labor Party and union hacks that I mentioned before? The answer is "No", because I can tell members opposite what the standards were in the previous Cabinet. Ministers were barred from appointing party officials—particularly office bearers. It was a rule of Cabinet. It was a direct order from the Premier and the then Deputy Premier. So we did not have Labor Party Treasurers and former Premiers and former Deputy Premiers appointed to positions. I say to those opposite that they will not be able to produce anything that resembles the rampant cronyism which we have documented and tabled in this place.

This morning, we had the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations springing to the defence of an appointment to the Industrial Relations Commission. He said, "Oh, she has not been a union official for 12 years." The fact is that she was a member of the Clerks Union. She was a vice-president of the Clerks Union. Those opposite cannot deny that. They cannot deny their history. They cannot deny their birth. They cannot deny their union connections. With that appointment, the Minister upset the balance of the Industrial Relations Commission in favour of union interests against the interests of employers. We will say a lot more about that in the future if we have to.

The other travesty of public administration in terms of cronyism is the method of appointment. The Beattie Labor Government massively increased the salaries of its directors-general—many of whom are Labor mates. They might talk about Dad's Army—distinguished, experienced, good directors-general employed by the coalition. Labor brought their own directors-general back and gave them pay rises of up to \$50,000. In many instances, Labor did away with selection panels for chief executive vacancies.

I have mentioned some of the examples, but it is worth mentioning them again because those opposite are obviously listening very carefully to what I am saying. Those opposite are becoming terribly excited. Examples include Public Service Commissioner Brian Head, who gazetted a notice exempting his own position from merit selection. What absolutely disgraceful, unethical behaviour! The Director-General of the Department of Equity and Fair Trading, Marg O'Donnell, also exempted herself from merit and equity selection. I should also mention the Director-General of the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Bob Marshman, who was repaid for services rendered while we were in Government.

When the Beattie Labor Government talks about jobs, jobs, jobs and constantly mouths that mantra, we can agree that they are presiding over

jobs, jobs, jobs, not in industry, but in the cronyism sector of this State. Government members stand condemned as hypocrites because the statements that they made in Opposition they are now not practising in Government. Cronyism is rampant in this State. This will be an ongoing saga that will embarrass and come to haunt the Government time after time in the future.
