



Speech by

**Mr S. SANTORO**

**MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD**

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Hansard 3 March 1999

#### **MINISTER FOR RACING**

**Mr SANTORO** (Clayfield—LP) (6.38 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to participate briefly in this debate, because I represent an electorate within which three of the biggest racing tracks in Queensland are located, these being Eagle Farm, Doomben and Albion Park. I have listened with great interest to the contributions made so far by Government members. It seems to me that the theme of their contribution is twofold: firstly, how much money the Goss Labor Government and now the Beattie Labor Government have given to the racing industry; and, secondly, the plans that the Minister has for the racing industry in this State. Very early in my contribution it is worth making the point, which was very ably made by the previous Minister and shadow Minister, that we are not talking about the Government's money when we are talking about money that is going to the industry; we are talking about industry money. The industry put the money into consultancies and the industry finances its own future. That point is recognised by everybody on this side of the House and, most importantly, by the industry.

In the contributions made so far by members opposite, we have heard that the Minister has a plan. I do not believe that the Minister has a plan. If any evidence was needed that the racing industry has no faith in the future plans of the Beattie Government and the Minister for the racing industry, one need look no further than an article that appeared in the Courier-Mail last Monday. In fact, the Queensland racing industry has so little faith in this Government's attempts to corporatise the TAB that it made an offer to purchase the TAB itself for \$80m—again, this is the racing industry speaking for itself. Such is the fear about the direction that this Government is moving in with its proposal to corporatise the TAB.

It is little wonder that the racing industry has these fears. Representatives of the industry have constantly asked the Minister for answers about

the future of the industry, but the Minister has constantly failed to reply because he is not listening to the industry. A great number of those people live in my electorate and they constantly tell me that. They have asked such fundamental questions as: will the TABQ have an exclusive sports betting licence in Queensland? What will be the timing of payments by the TABQ to the racing industry? Who will have responsibility for determining which capital projects are pursued within racing? What will happen to the Racing Development Fund debt and the fund itself? Surely the Minister has a responsibility to answer these questions. Surely the Minister for Racing has a responsibility to consult with the racing industry. Instead, he intends to take a submission to Cabinet and then consult or, rather, dictate.

I heard the Minister say that he still favours privatisation; he favoured it from day one when he got into Government. The Minister did not consult; he just got rolled by the unions and by the Socialist Left. At least the Minister has the decency to say that he still favours privatisation. However, he should also have the decency to say that he got rolled and defeated. He should give some clear direction to the industry and let it get on with the job. The Minister should say that he cannot deliver rather than string along the industry and pretend that he favours and will implement privatisation. He cannot deliver on that one. The Minister may be able to deliver on other things, but he cannot deliver on privatisation, because the unions and his mates in the Socialist Left just will not let him do it.

It is no secret that the privatised TABs in New South Wales and Victoria are threatening racing in Queensland. That is the tragedy: while the Minister dithers, the racing industry in Queensland is under threat. It is no secret that the Beattie Government has sacrificed privatisation and, therefore, sacrificed the racing industry to appease elements within the ALP and the union

movement. Both the Premier and his Minister canned privatisation despite an earlier pledge to proceed with it. They did it because they just cannot deliver.

In one regional newspaper, the Racing Minister was quoted as saying—

"I believe we have no choice but to privatise the TAB if we are going to stay on equal footing with New South Wales and Victoria, and I have given my wholehearted support."

That wholehearted support that was pledged by the Minister turned into a wholehearted backflip. The tragedy of it all is that this Minister cannot deliver. The racing industry is absolutely without direction. In this instance, I think that it is important to quote the editorial of the Courier-Mail, which stated—

"Mr Gibbs should not adopt a Pontius Pilate stance; he is the Minister and it is his job to solve the problems. Party politics should not be put before the industry and state interests."

The Minister has a reputation for being a man of power, a man of clout, a man of influence. He should just get on with the job, convince his colleagues that privatisation is, as he believes, the best way for the industry to go, provide leadership, be effective and stand up to the unions just for once in his political life. It is then that the Minister will earn the respect of the people in my electorate whom I represent, and I represent many racing people.

Time expired.

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