



Speech by

Mr S. SANTORO

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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ASIA-PACIFIC CITIES SUMMIT

Mr SANTORO (Clayfield—LP) (11.49 a.m.): I wish to advise honourable members of some mischief making in the Taiwanese media that names me and which has recently come to my notice. Last Thursday, 18 March, the *China News*, an English language newspaper, published an article that appears to attempt to poison the mutually productive and very friendly relationship between the people of Taiwan and Queensland—and even more broadly than that, and dangerously, between Australia and Taiwan. I table a copy of that article for the information of honourable members.

Mr Speaker, as honourable members including yourself would know, Brisbane has just hosted the second Asia-Pacific Cities Summit, an event organised by the City of Brisbane and which this year attracted a great deal of interest from civic and provincial Government figures and private enterprise in Taiwan. This summit, like all such occasions—whomever they are organised by—was an opportunity to showcase Queensland to our near and valuable neighbours. It should never have been an excuse for the party opposite and its supporters in some sections of the community to seek to make partisan political capital.

The article from the *China News* that I have just tabled, however, demonstrates with stark and appalling clarity the institutionalised poverty of ideas that afflicts the Labor Party. It is a carefully planted little bit of poison designed by those opposite and their supporters in the community not to further the good relations between Queensland and Taiwan—relations that are both mutually beneficial and are growing more valuable every year—but to protect the Labor Party's turf.

It is a farrago of misinformation—of disinformation, in fact. If we are to believe the

article—and in the absence of provable denials from the honourable members opposite, we have no reason not to believe it—Labor members in this place and their supporters have circulated a mischievous memorandum to members of the Taiwanese community here which is designed to muddy the waters of Taiwanese politics and to profit the ALP at the expense of the broader Queensland and national interest. It alleges that a banquet organised in Brisbane for the Mayor of Taipei was an embarrassment because it clashed with the official reception at the opening of the cities summit. But the real gripe—the thin-skinned gripe—of those opposite appears to be that star billing was not accorded to the Labor luminaries in attendance.

Everyone in this place should be above that sort of pernicious politicking when as Queenslanders and Australians we are entertaining foreign guests. Anyone who lets partisan advantage—or the search for it—take precedence in those circumstances deserves to be condemned. The immediate target of the article appears to be the head of Taiwan's unofficial office in Sydney, who it is asserted has angered the Brisbane Taiwanese community and who fails to understand the complexities of Queensland politics. This unfortunate official would be far from the first person to fail to understand the complexities of Queensland politics as depicted by the three-ring circus that is the Labor Party opposite.

I state for the record that during and immediately after the cities summit—an initiative of the Labor Lord Mayor of Brisbane that we on this side of the House wholeheartedly applaud, and let me underline that fact, too—I had the pleasure of attending three functions which involved delegates from Taiwan. I did so because of my extensive and longstanding connections

with a wide cross-section of Queensland's ethnic communities and my strong support for them. As honourable members know, I happily hold the shadow portfolio of Ethnic Affairs. Foreign interests deserve to know that in matters of international relations, trade and investment, domestic politics has no role to play.

I attended the banquet given in Mayor Ma's honour and had the privilege of being seated with him. He is a highly informed leader and we exchanged views of direct and mutual interest to Queensland and Taiwan. I was called upon to speak. I should stress at this point that it was an unexpected—indeed, unscripted—duty, but also a pleasure in such pleasant company. I attended a dinner at the Gold Coast arranged for the large delegation from Tai-nan City and county, who were making their first visit—and I now believe it will not be their last—to Queensland. I also spoke on that occasion and had interesting and informative discussions with both Mayor Chang and Governor Chen.

I attended an informal lunch in Brisbane with my honourable friend from another place, Federal Employment Services Minister Tony Abbott, in the company of two mayors from Taiwan. I was invited by the Speaker of this Parliament to attend a reception he so kindly hosted for the Mayor of Kao-hsiung within this very precinct. Unfortunately, because I was required to be in the Chamber at the time of the function, I was unable to attend.

I was pleased on these occasions—and I am pleased on any occasion—to attend any function in the interest of advancing bilateral links between Queensland and the civic or Government leaders of foreign places. As honourable members know—or if they do not, they should—it is no part of bilateral international relationships to play the domestic political card. My interest in Taiwan—the coalition's interest in Taiwan—is like our interest in any other foreign place: wholly removed from partisan political interest. Our domestic politics are our business and Taiwan's are its business. That is the only responsible practice in international relations, and those opposite who were miffed over dinnertime seating arrangements or fearful for the quantum of their war chest should remember that.

The China News article goes on to state that the preference decision relating to the late and unlamented One Nation Party was a strategy to forge Queensland Government links with One Nation. That is a base lie—in fact, it is a baseless lie—and would not have been published in the potentially damaging way it has been without some disingenuous coaching from the party opposite. At the very best, it is a clumsy and misinformed assessment of the facts. At worst, it is a barefaced untruth that we must assume has been planted with a view to furthering the Labor Party's interests at the expense of Queensland's and the nation's.

It is a well-known fact—though rarely reported in the media in this State—that the Labor Party receives significant funding from sections of the Taiwanese community in Queensland and from powerful identities in Taiwan itself. I make the point that in our democracy there is nothing wrong with that. It is a basic freedom that we in Australia take for granted: that we all may individually support in words or in deeds—or with legal tender if we so desire and can afford it—the political party of our choice. But it should stick in the craw of every decent Australian of whatever political persuasion or ethnic origin that this right should be injured as a democratic concept by a party like that opposite which is constantly proclaiming the perfection of its irreducible commitment to democratic principle while all the time it is doing grubby little deals behind closed doors with benefactors it arrogantly presumes to be its alone, forever.

Queensland is an open society with a lot to offer the world and particularly to our friends in our own region. There is a great deal of bipartisanship where international trade and investment policy is concerned—and there should be, because it is about the future of every Queenslander—and it will not be derailed by grubby politicking from a few number-crunchers on the other side who on the strength of their third lowest ever primary vote are temporarily in charge of the Treasury benches.

Our concern as Queenslanders—and I make the point that this is the concern of everyone in this Chamber—is to maximise employment opportunities and wealth generation for the future. That is our mutual and overriding objective. It is sad that some people opposite are prepared to play party games rather than do the real work. It can only be of passing interest—arcane interest perhaps—to our friends in Taiwan whether the honourable member for Bundamba places his bets from that side of the House or this side, or whether the honourable member for Sunnybank is concerned—or, indeed, the honourable member for Mansfield—to shore up their numbers next time round or whether the honourable member for Archerfield is enjoying the sinecure to which Labor Party factional numbers have anointed her.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! The member for Mansfield! The member is obviously not taking interjections, so the member for Mansfield will desist. He will get his turn in a moment.

Mr SANTORO: True, there might be more concern in those places about the disastrous industrial relations policy—the policy of supine acquiescence to big union power—that the can't do Beattie Government is putting in place, but that debate is for another time.

Taiwan is this country's fourth largest trading partner. It is a vibrant and progressive market economy from which Queensland can gain many benefits and make much profit. Our relationship with Taiwan is mutually supportive. The Taiwanese community in Queensland is Australia's largest, and that itself is welcome evidence that Queensland is a progressive, open and accommodating society with a world view that sadly is never emphasised enough in the reporting of our communal life.

People who hail from Taiwan play an enormously important part in our life as a community. It is a valuable part. We on this side of the House would like our Taiwanese friends to play an even more important role in developing Queensland as a place that will serve the interests of Queenslanders and our overseas friends better still in the new century and new millennium that is about to dawn. The productive and profitable relationship that we already have with the world can and must be expanded further. It will not be—or at least the likelihood of its being so will be reduced—if we stand by and let the Labor Party seek to advantage itself by involving outsiders in our domestic politics.

Certain elements of the party opposite and its supporters in the community have been caught out in a grubby little ploy to advantage themselves at the potential expense of Queensland. In this place and on the record of this place I condemn them for it.
