



Speech by

**Tony ELLIOTT**

**MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM**

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Hansard 22 July 1999

**MR SPEAKER'S RULING**

**Motion of Dissent**

**Mr ELLIOTT** (Cunningham—NPA) (3.07 p.m.): I believe that there is nothing we on this side of the House want more than to do just as previous speakers have suggested, that is, support the Speaker's rulings on all occasions. I do not wish to go over the ground traversed by the first two speakers from this side of the House, because I think most of the points they made are correct.

There seems to be a practice in this House of Ministers staying on their feet and continuing to talk when another speaker is on his or her feet, whether that be to take a point of order or in other circumstances. I recall the Minister for Fair Trading continuing to talk while the Speaker was in fact dealing with the issue. To my way of thinking, that is not the correct procedure.

I have been thrown out of this place only once under Standing Order 123A. That instance related to a particularly difficult circumstance in my electorate. On every other occasion I have respected the Chair pretty readily when I have been told that I am out of order or that I should stop interjecting. If that has happened, I have usually taken heed of that advice. I have been thrown out only once in the 24-odd years I have been a member of this place. I do not think I am a person who has disrespect for the Chair or who thinks it is smart to play games as far as the Speaker is concerned.

I believe we all have to look at the public perception of how we in this Chamber conduct ourselves. That has a very large bearing on the public's confidence—or lack of it—in the Parliament's proceedings. We should think about when the House has run well and when people did not seem to want to play games. We have had a number of Speakers over the past few years. Some Speakers have displayed perhaps more acumen than have others in keeping balance in the House and ensuring that people have not tended to play games with the Speaker.

When the member for Beaudesert, the Honourable Kev Lingard, was Speaker, he seemed to have an ability to stand and members would take notice of him. He did not have to yell and carry on. There have been other Speakers from this side of the House who would stand and roar like a bull, but still nobody would take any notice of them. So it is not just a matter of someone having a big voice or being able to perhaps shout other people down. Basically, all a Speaker should have to do is stand and have the respect of the House and members should listen to him. That is what one would hope would happen. I believe that the previous Speaker, Mr Turner, had the respect of members on both sides of the House and, in the main, members did not really challenge his authority.

In this last instance, we seem to have gone off the rails a bit in terms of where we all ought to be going. Perhaps we should be looking at this objectively and saying to ourselves, "In this instance, the Speaker's ruling was not correct." As such, maybe we should all be asking, "What can we do to ensure that we do not get ourselves into these situations again in the future?" I do not see much point in debating these dissent motions because, quite frankly, we all have better things to do. However, I do believe that it is important that we all think about what makes us feel comfortable with the rulings of the Speaker and be prepared to abide by those rulings without disputing them.

The most important thing that a Speaker can do is make members feel comfortable with his rulings. I have sat up there and presided over the election of Speaker, so at least I have some feeling of what it is like to have members looking at me rather than me looking at the speaker. It can be quite a daunting task. It is not an easy task. The Speaker has my utmost sympathy and, 99.99% of the time, my support. But on this occasion, perhaps on the spur of the moment, the Speaker made a decision and then felt that he had to go with it. That is probably human nature.

It would be better for this Parliament if we ensured that we do not get ourselves into these situations. The Speaker is a bit like Caesar's wife; not only must he be pure, but he must be seen to be pure. So it is terribly important that no-one can point a finger and suggest that any of the Speaker's rulings favour one side of the House over the other. If they do, obviously that makes it more difficult for the Speaker to maintain the necessary confidence to do that very difficult job. All members respect the fact that it is not an easy job. I know just how difficult it is. As I said, several Speakers from this side of the House were not able to do that job very well. They found it exceedingly difficult.

All members must consider this whole situation objectively. In this case, I believe that the Speaker's ruling was incorrect. But that does not mean to say that I will not support him in the future. I will support him wholeheartedly. But I believe that Government members should ensure that they do not put the Speaker under pressure. On a number of occasions, members on both sides of the House—and particularly members of the Executive—have tended to put the Speaker in an invidious position whereby, if he does not rule the way that they want him to, it appears that he is being disloyal to members on his side of the House. A Speaker should never be put in that position. All we should ask of a Speaker is that he rule fairly and objectively. And if he does that, we should all be quite happy with the way he operates and give him the respect that he deserves.

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