



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

Hansard 20 June 2000

GST AND RELATED MATTERS BILL

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (3.44 p.m.): It is with a little dismay and bewilderment that I find that I must rise and join this debate today—bewilderment that Howard actually thought that he had a mandate to bring in this GST and dismay that Labor appears to be following the same track. Apart from being a tax that is going to disadvantage Queenslanders, the GST is a tax that has been introduced with complete disregard for the taxpaying public and with complete disregard for democracy.

We all know that compulsory preferential voting and the failure of the AEC to uphold the Commonwealth Electoral Act and to count every vote where the intention is clear means that Federal elections are not free elections. We all know that John Howard never had a mandate and we have heard him explain that a mandate at an election is absolutely phoney. In 1987, as Leader of the Opposition, John Howard said—

"The Prime Minister"—

and he was referring to Bob Hawke—

"and government members should not hide behind the argument that there is some kind of mandate out of the last election. That suggestion is invalid, not only in terms of the number of votes cast, but also on the simple proposition that when people vote at an election they do not vote on only one issue. The mandate theory of politics from the point of view of proper analysis has always been absolutely phoney."

We all hear people in the street, in their workplaces, in their homes and at parties confused as to how we have got to the stage that we are at now. They did not vote for this tax; they were not asked if this was what they wanted. They did not have a say in this destructive tax that has already begun its intrusion into every aspect of their lives. They do not understand it and they do not want it; nor should they have it. Democracy means rule by the people, not rule by the politicians.

The average bloke can see clearly that Howard has no mandate and that in a democracy this tax is illegal. How can the people in this Chamber fail to see that? Because they do not want to see it! Labor does not really want to stop the GST because it knows that the next time it is in Government it will be able to pass off this mandate rubbish and get away with it whenever it pleases: "Howard did it, so why not?" Again, so much for representative democracy!

I will be watching with cynical interest the actions of the member for Woodridge when this vote is taken. The member certainly did not get elected on his good looks nor because of the ethical behaviour of his predecessor or his party. No, he was elected because the Premier exposed the evils of the goods and services tax and convinced the good people of Woodridge that he and his protege, the member for Woodridge, were opposed to the goods and services tax. No doubt then we can expect the member for Woodridge to listen to the concerns of his constituents and honour his implied promise to them that he will fight against the GST. Perhaps that would be a forlorn hope given this morally and ethically bankrupt Government. The good people of Woodridge accepted this Labor Party hack, who was dropped on them, in the vain hope that he would vote against the intended introduction of the goods and services tax. That was indeed a vain, vain hope.

Why did the Premier not take the chance to include a goods and services tax question in the local council elections held here in March this year? A Premier who was sincere in his quest to stop a

tax that he himself describes as bad for Queenslanders would have jumped at the chance to get a real indication from the people. If that vote came back as a no, which I fully believe it would, the Premier could have then argued that he had no choice but to ensure that Queensland did not have a GST because he would have then had a mandate from the people—a real mandate. Now, that would be representative democracy and the taxpayers of this State might not begrudge him his wages so much because he had done what they wanted him to do. After two days of harassing phone calls over the fuel rebate, he did listen to Queenslanders. After all, the taxpayers are our employers, are they not? They are supposed to be. Unfortunately, some people in this Chamber seem to think that the taxpayers are merely the ants who work and make the money to fund their luxurious lifestyles. They are treated as fools, and this is obvious from the propaganda and the deceit that flows from the mouths of many people in this Chamber. This is also blatantly obvious from the manner in which this GST has been fraudulently imposed upon the people and from the myriad excuses we have heard from the Premier and his blind followers.

I ask members to listen to one statement made by a spokesman from the Premier's office. He said—

"Of course the Beattie Government is opposed to the Goods and Services Tax and have always been opposed to it. However, for good or ill, this Tax has been introduced and we all have to live with it."

That is more propaganda of the same type used by many Labor Party politicians and prospective politicians. It is not the case that this tax has been introduced and we all have to live with it at all. Tell that to the electorate when they are forced to vote at the next State election. What is the point of having a State Government if it is just to rubber stamp Federal policy? Further, try to explain to them why they should vote for any Labor, Liberal or National Government in the future. At some stage over the past 20-odd years all of them have had one of their leaders say that they will not introduce a GST or they do not support a GST only to then say the opposite some time later. After all, Mr Keating introduced the idea of a consumption tax in 1981.

The people are sick of the promises that they know are not intended to be kept. They are starting to see through this charade of your-turn, my-turn politics that is played behind the scenes while the screenplay is not representative democracy. City Country Alliance will ensure that members are exposed and will ensure that every single electorate is aware of how their member voted on this issue. We will work to help them find the hypocrisy. I feel the need to remind members of this House of their obligation and their duty to the people of their electorates and to remind them of the purposes of this Parliament. Contrary to the Treasurer's beliefs as expressed in his second-reading speech in which he referred to this legislation as the State's obligation, this is a representative democracy and every member of this House is free to vote how they choose.

I would like to read something to the Chamber. I would like everyone to listen closely to these words and, if they do not choose to believe what I say, then go out of the Chamber and check them out for themselves. We all know that the mace that sits in this Parliament during sittings, as a symbol of the Speaker's authority from the Crown and visible evidence of the authority of this Parliament, is stored in a glass case outside this Chamber. The sign explaining the purpose of the mace to visitors contains the following—

"... the Speaker, who is elected by a free vote of all members to preside over its deliberations and administer its functions.

This power and authority rests ultimately in the people, who elect their representatives, and their freedom can only survive while the freedom of parliamentarians to effectively represent them survives.

Their freedom of speech, and freedom to vote as their conscience dictates must not be limited by any other consideration than the judgment of the electors whom they represent.

The Mace serves as a constant reminder to all, that these freedoms and the authority and power of the Parliament, which were won over such a long period, must be vigilantly protected from erosion."

I repeat—

"Their freedom of speech, and freedom to vote as their conscience dictates must not be limited by any other consideration than the judgment of the electors whom they represent."

Surely the Premier, the Treasurer and everyone else who made public comment about the goods and services tax in recent times would know this. Why then are they saying to the public that the goods and services tax is law and that we indeed have no choice? Why are they misleading the public into thinking that the goods and services tax, the GST, is final and it is here to stay when clearly it is not?

This Parliament can, as can any other Parliament in any other State or Territory, vote against this Bill and roll it back on top of Canberra. The Labor Party has no problem in telling the public that

they will stop the goods and services tax. In the recent by-elections they certainly had no problem telling the people that they could stop the GST, that they would vote against it and that it would not come in. But, even though they campaigned strongly against it, we still see them introducing it and voting for it. They told the public that they would stop it. As I said, they campaigned strongly against it. Their supporters handed out how-to-vote cards in those booths saying, "Stop the GST. Vote Labor." A lot of good that is doing now, because they are not stopping the GST. This Parliament can stop the GST, and those opposite very well know it. Every Labor member in this House will get a chance to vote on this Bill. We will certainly see how true their word is when that vote comes.

Do not think that the coalition gets off lightly, either. Its mates in Canberra have done the dirty work needed to inflict this tax upon the people. And where do the Nationals lie? In bed with their Liberal buddies or with the people they suggest they represent? Even the Premier has commented on the unfairness of the tax to the people in rural and regional areas. Will National Party members of Parliament fulfil the purpose of their employment by the people, or will they allow themselves to be the party to overthrow this democracy?

In his second-reading speech the Treasurer congratulated the Federal member for Fairfax for standing alone and standing proud. The Treasurer said—

"The honourable member for Fairfax obviously has a firmer grasp of concepts such as fairness and decency, loyalty and valour than your average GST apologist in the Liberal and National Parties ... he is obviously a fish out of water—an ability to understand concepts of basic decency and fairness and loyalty are not of benefit in the coalition ..."

These same words apply here today, not just to Liberal and National Party members of Parliament but to Labor members of Parliament and to the Treasurer. People who live in glass houses should not throw stones. It is a long lane that has no turning. These are a couple of old sayings that come to mind at this moment as these words are turned back to face the Treasurer.

This applies especially to Labor Party members because they speak consistently of the problems with the tax—the unfairness, how bad it is for Queensland and so on. The rantings are over the top. Having said these things, will they also vote for it? I believe they will. If they do not vote for it, then one could use the Treasurer's same judgment of praise for the Federal member for Fairfax for every member of this House. If they do vote for it, then one could easily suggest that the Treasurer does not see himself or his colleagues as fair and decent or loyal and with valour, that he sees himself and his colleagues only as average GST apologists. That is exactly how the electorate will see him and the Labor Party at the next election.

The coalition and Labor members of this House will attempt to bog people down in the detail of the goods and services tax legislation—in the detail of the devil, the GST itself. They have attempted to do so already in other areas.

Regardless of the finer points of the goods and services tax and its multitude of problems, on which many of us agree, the crux of the matter is that the goods and services tax is not a done deal until the legislation is passed in every State and Territory of Australia, regardless of the Premier's agreement or the Treasurer's belief that this State is obligated to implement the GST. In the United States, some States apply a goods and services tax and some do not. I do not see that country crumbling as a result.

Regardless of the Premier's agreement and the Treasurer's belief, this State is not obligated to implement the GST. Every member of this Parliament is free to vote against this legislation. Every member of this Parliament is bound to uphold the representative democracy through which they were elected. Will City Country Alliance members and the Independents in this House be the only ones left with any credibility at the end of this debate? I believe so. The only members of Parliament who can be trusted to uphold the duty of their appointment to this House obviously are the members of the City Country Alliance and the Independents. The words accompanying the mace say it all. Let every individual member contemplate them very seriously when they formulate their votes.

The City Country Alliance will not be a party to this overthrow of democracy and the fraudulent introduction of this destructive tax upon Queenslanders. I will not support the GST and Related Matters Bill 2000 in the interests of the people of Queensland and in the interests of upholding the democracy of this country. I will not be branded as many others here will be. We know why the Prostitution Bill was introduced earlier: the supporters of this Bill can be labelled "Howard's whores". The Treasurer will probably be the bagman—the bagman of Queensland.

I finish by re-reading the last sentence on the plaque that accompanies the mace. It states—

"The Mace serves as a constant reminder to all, that these freedoms and the authority and power of the Parliament, which were won over such a long period, must be vigilantly protected from erosion."

I hear the words of the apologists for the GST who sit opposite.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr FELDMAN: The member for Lytton will have a lot of people to apologise to at the next election when he tells them that he voted for this Bill and that he allowed the GST to be on the statute book. He will be apologising to the people of his electorate and to the people of this State.

The member for Lytton knows how much the GST will hurt people. He is supposed to be representing the battlers of this country, yet they are the ones who will be paying it—the pensioners, the battlers, the hard workers and those on the breadline. That is from whom the GST will be taken. The Government will not be taking it from anybody else; it will be taking it from the very mouths of the people those opposite are supposed to be representing, the battlers of this State—the battlers in Woodridge, in Lytton and in Bulimba—who vote for them. Those opposite should think about that.

They are the people those opposite will be apologising to at the next election. They are the people who will be expecting their apology because this is not good legislation. The Premier knows it. He has already said it. The Treasurer agreed in his second-reading speech that this will be bad for Queensland. It certainly will be. We will not be supporting it in any way, shape or form.
