Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR MERRIMAC

Hansard 15 November 2000

FUEL PRICES

Mr QUINN (Merrimac—LP) (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) (11.50 a.m.): I second the amendment moved by the member for Warwick, Mr Springborg. This morning we have seen just another one of the stunts by the Labor Party in a desperate bid to shift attention away from some of the real issues facing the Government. Much has been made of the Liberal Party position as to whether or not we support a freeze on the next rise in fuel excise due in February 2001. Anyone who can read the motion put before the House last night, anyone who has even a rudimentary understanding of parliamentary procedures, knows the position of the Liberal Party and all honourable members on this side of the House. Let me read again the motion that was agreed to, and not dissented from, in the House last night. It stated—

> "That this House calls on Prime Minister Howard and the Federal Parliament to recognise the negative impacts on rural and regional Queensland, indeed all Queenslanders and all Australians, of the escalating fuel prices being experienced and freeze the fuel excise CPI price rise expected in February 2001."

That went through without a dissenting voice. Is there anything about this motion that members opposite do not understand? Do they not understand the meaning of "freeze" and "CPI"? Do they not understand that, by agreeing to the motion going through without dissent, everyone on this side—Liberal, National and Independent members— supported the motion? What is it that they do not understand? Where is the voice?

Mrs Edmond: Where were the Liberals?

Mr QUINN: The motion was agreed to. We all agreed to it. We, the Liberals, are members of the House. We agreed to it. What is it that members opposite do not understand? That highlights that this whole thing is just a stunt. But, further, what about the motion this morning, which stated—

> "That the Queensland Parliament, recognising the extreme pressures on Queensland families and small businesses by the continual escalation of petrol prices, requests the Prime Minister, John Howard, and his Government to immediately give a commitment to Queenslanders that they will not further increase fuel excise in February 2001."

We have said that we will support that part of the motion. What is it about our position that members opposite do not understand? Government members have said, "You're not saying anything about fuel excise, tax and other things." What is it that they do not understand? They are silent. The reason is that this is just another stunt by the Labor Party to railroad us away from the real issues.

Mr Malone: To get away from question time.

Mr QUINN: Yes, to get away from question time, soak up the time of the House and close down Parliament in December and not come back—to do everything they can except face the real issues.

As I said, this is a stunt and it reeks of hypocrisy. Why does it reek of hypocrisy? We have only to go back and look at the previous positions of the Labor Party on this issue over a long period. The first instance that has come to my attention was in 1990. The Labor Party was in State Government and the Federal Labor Party was in Government in Canberra. Keating would have been Treasurer at that time. At that time, in this House, Mr Stoneman, who was then the member for Burdekin, came into

the House to move a motion without notice. Under the Standing Orders in those days, we simply had to seek leave to move a motion without notice.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I said earlier on that I will demand relevance.

Mr QUINN: It is relevant.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! It is not relevant to speak about parliamentary procedures. The member will return to debating the motion and the amendments.

Mr QUINN: With respect, Mr Deputy Speaker, the motion relates to fuel prices and excise.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! So that is relevant to this motion?

Mr QUINN: Yes, it certainly is.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Okay. Let us hear it.

Mr QUINN: In those days, as Mr Deputy Speaker knows, we could not give full expression to the motion, we simply had to seek leave to move a motion without notice. Mr Stoneman managed to get this part of it out—

> "That this Parliament requests the Federal Treasurer to set aside all windfall fuel price excise revenue."

The question was put. What was the result? The Labor Party in Government used its numbers to defeat the motion. All of the coalition members voted that the motion be debated. This was back in 1990, when Mr Beattie was sitting opposite. In 1990 the fuel price and fuel excise issue was first mentioned in this House. What did the Labor Party do? They ran away from it. They would not debate it.

Mr Davidson: Who did Mr Beattie vote with?

Mr QUINN: I wonder with whom Mr Beattie voted.

Dr Watson: And who Mr Hamill voted with.

Mr QUINN: And Mr Hamill and everyone else. That is the first example of their hypocrisy on this issue.

Moving to the present day, there was a shambles when they tried to impose a fuel excise on Queensland motorists. The proposition was put forward by the Premier and the Treasurer that the subsidy scheme should be abolished, with 8.3c a litre being put back on the price of fuel and a trade-off in terms of registration fees. What reason was given? The scheme was being rorted! We calculated that, for the scheme to have been rorted to the extent the Government was claiming, 60 tankers a day would have to have been crossing the border. That is 420 tankers a week and 20,000 tankers a year going from Brisbane through the Gold Coast or along one of the western highways over the border.

Mr Seeney: Couldn't find one.

Mr QUINN: They could not launch one prosecution. They could not do anything about the 20,000 tankers churning up the highways. We would have been repairing the highways 24 hours a day, if 20,000 tankers were going across the border. But there was not one prosecution.

Again, we saw rank hypocrisy. The best one was the Premier standing up and saying, "We want the Commonwealth Government to implement a royal commission to find out why prices are high", knowing full well that he had the power under his own jurisdiction to do exactly that. What did he do? He ran away from it again. He did not want to have an inquiry into petrol price rises in Queensland. This was just another passing bandwagon that this populist Premier wanted to leap all over. If a bandwagon comes to Queensland, this Premier is all over it like a rash.

That is what this is all about—shoring up a populist Premier. Irrespective of what the issue is and irrespective of his position in the past, he does not worry about hypocrisy, humbug or anything else; if it is a way to get his photograph or name in the paper and his face on the television, he will jump on board. We have only to look at other issues such as Telstra and bank fees. They go on and on. He will leap on board issues he has nothing to do with or very little control over. And when he does have something to do with it—

Mr Beanland: He runs.

Mr QUINN: —he will not do anything about it. He will run a mile when it comes to actually doing something about it. He should not come in here and say he is concerned, because he has the power to do something about it. He can have his own State-based royal commission to investigate why the anomaly is occurring. But does he want a royal commission in this State? Not a word! Silence is golden. They are not fair dinkum. They are using this issue for cheap political purposes. That is all they are doing. They are not fair dinkum about this.

If this Government is genuine, it will support the Opposition's amendments to this motion. If it is not genuine—I suspect it is not; and the evidence is there that it is not genuine, that this is just another

diversion from the real issues confronting this State and that this is just another issue to hide its pathetic performance on a whole range of issues—of course we will see it defeated. They do not want a royal commission. They do not want to find out the facts of the matter. All they want to do is raise the issue, scurry away under a rock like rats and let someone else try to work out solutions to the problems.

What we have seen here this morning is the moving of a motion in the House, the Opposition moving reasonable amendments to it, the Premier realising that he has kicked an own goal, and the Deputy Premier coming scurrying back in trying to save the ball from going into the back of the net by moving another set of amendments. What is going on here is just a farce.

Mr Springborg: Sounded like a good idea at the time.

Mr QUINN: It sounded like a good idea at the time, but it has backfired, like a lot of other things that have gone on in this House in the last week or so. It looks good—

Mr Braddy: Smoked you out.

Mr QUINN: Smoked us out? We were never in hiding. We were on the record last night as having agreed to the motion. Where were we hiding? Again this morning we have said that we will agree to the motion. Where are we hiding? Nowhere! Again, just plain hypocrisy is exposed.

The amendments that we on this side of the House have moved to this motion deserve to be supported. If they are not, the hypocrisy, the humbug, the dishonesty of the Government will be there for everyone to see.