



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

Hansard 18 May 2000

CENSURE OF MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS AND MINISTER FOR HOUSING

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (6.33 p.m.): Tonight I rise in support of this motion. Since the events of 1 May, Queensland has witnessed a deliberate cover-up by a corrupt Government in an attempt to protect and shield the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing from both public scrutiny and the consequences of breaking the law. The Minister and the Government have exerted pressure and threats on third parties in an attempt to suppress the full details of this disgraceful act from becoming fully public and to obstruct the due process of the law.

However, this is not the only occasion on which the temper of the Minister has landed him in trouble. Who can forget the now infamous Strangers Bar incident involving the Minister? However, what I found more interesting than the previous form of the Minister was the comments he made when questioned in this House about that incident. In another effort to deflect attention from his disgraceful behaviour, the Minister said—

"The Minister for Transport would have been little assistance in that regard had a fracas been under way. I actually donned gloves when I was younger and I was not too bad at it."

The Minister actually boasts about his ability to belt up people! The corker for me was when the Minister said—

"I, as always, conducted myself in a proper manner."

All I can say is that, if this Minister was conducting himself in a proper manner in the park that day, I fear for the innocent public of Queensland if the Minister ever decided to misbehave in a public place. However, if the actions of Mr Swarten in that park in Rockhampton were not bad enough for a member of Parliament, they were abhorrent for a Minister of the Crown. The Minister should recognise that he holds a very high office within our democratic society—a position which not only brings him additional benefits but also significant responsibilities, one of which is the administration of a portfolio.

It is becoming clearly apparent that the Minister no longer cares about community expectations and cares even less for his portfolio responsibility. In December 1998 the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing claimed that his new tender reform would "eliminate cowboys from the industry and avoid problems rather than trying to solve them after they occur". It appears that his rhetoric has exceeded his ability yet again. This is evident by the string of subcontractors burned by their dealings with Designer Steel Homes Pty Ltd working on Government projects at Cunnamulla, St George, Cleveland and Coopers Plains. Designer Steel Homes has now appointed a voluntary administrator and has assets of only \$28,900 whilst owing about 260 trade creditors over \$620,000.

One has to question how and why Designer Steel Homes was doing Government work in the first place and why it was given further Government work on other projects after having failed to successfully complete its current projects. If anybody had bothered to check the corporate history of a key individual in Designer Steel Homes, Mr Stephen Black, they would have discovered that he was also a director of Nu-Steel Constructions Pty Ltd, which also ceased to operate after a deed of agreement in 1998. How did the company get pre-tender qualification under his administration and what checks into that company and its financial details were carried out by his department?

I will tell honourable members why. It is because the Minister no longer cares about people, small business owners or the laws of Queensland. Through the Minister's maladministration, he has

inflicted hardship and suffering on hardworking and dedicated subcontractors who expected and deserved the protection of the pre-tender qualification system that the Minister promised. The Minister should hang his head in shame.

The member for Capalaba spoke about not raising issues when the coalition was in Government. During the debate on the MOU in this place, day after day Rob Borbidge and Russell Cooper were accused of corruption. The Minister for Public Works should have acted like a normal Australian in the park on May Day instead of behaving like a common thug and cowardly king-hitting a member of the public. The Minister should also have faced the consequences of his action instead of hiding from police and using the ALP to broker a deal to get him off the hook. The honourable member should vacate his office as a Minister of the Crown and allow it to be filled by someone who will demonstrate the appropriate behaviour expected of a holder of that high office.
