



Speech by

**Dr DAVID WATSON**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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Hansard 23 August 2000

### **ELECTORAL FRAUD**

**Dr WATSON** (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.14 p.m.): I am delighted to inform the Premier that he has got himself a Federal inquiry—not on fuel prices but on electoral fraud. The Special Minister of State, Christopher Ellison, today referred allegations of electoral fraud and vote rigging in the Queensland ALP to the Federal Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. Senator Ellison said that systemic electoral roting in Queensland threatens the very integrity of the electoral process.

We welcome a Federal inquiry, but we still must have a full and open State inquiry. That is why I second the motion that this House expresses its profound concern that the Labor Party corrupted the 1995, 1996 and 1998 elections in Townsville seats by fraudulently enrolling voters and calls on the Beattie Government to establish a full open, independent and public inquiry.

On the subject of inquiries, I will begin tonight by quoting the author of the most famous inquiry report in the history of Queensland. When Tony Fitzgerald brought down his report in 1989, he had a few words to say about the sorts of people who would be best suited to be working at the Criminal Justice Commission. He said—

"Alert energetic people will be needed to perform the demanding tasks which membership of the CJC will involve."

Clearly, when it came to investigating the most scandalous example of "looking after your mates" in Australian political history—the net bet affair—the CJC was neither alert nor energetic. It whipped through the net bet investigation in two weeks. It ignored reams of information we supplied, saying it was outside its jurisdiction. It failed to interview key witnesses. It failed to live up to the hope of Tony Fitzgerald. It failed the people of Queensland. We welcome the Federal inquiry, but we call for a State inquiry as well. But it must be an inquiry conducted by alert and energetic people. When Karen Ehrmann made Australian legal history by becoming the first person in this country ever sent to jail for electoral fraud, her case raised more questions than it answered.

So that the energies of the inquiry team are directed towards the right places, I would like to alert it to several matters. The first question that has to be asked is simply this: where did the money come from—the money for her court costs and the money to pay all those ALP membership fees for phantom voters? By her own admission, Karen Ehrmann was not a wealthy woman. In fact, in her affidavit presented on the day of her sentencing last Friday week, she said she was so poor that when living in Brisbane after first being charged she was forced to eat at the Hare Krishna soup kitchen in Fortitude Valley. She said—

"I was hungry and alone. At night I dreamt of food and eating apples."

She went on to say—

"I have suffered health wise, mentally and physically, as well as financially. I have nothing left to fight with."

So how did a woman with nothing left to fight with pay for a top silk? Was he paid for by any Labor entity? If so, what strings were attached?

Furthermore, how did a woman who described herself as an underdog afford to pay for so many ALP memberships between 1993 and 1997? Documents tabled in this Parliament on 5 March 1998

show that Karen Ehrmann paid the membership fees for no fewer than 78 members of the Heatly Vincent branch of the ALP in March 1997. That branch had 95 members and she paid the membership fees for 78 of them. Perhaps the remaining 19 members of that branch would like to know why she did not pay their membership fees as well! I would certainly like to know—I think any inquiry must know—where she got the money. It was not just for one year for one branch that she paid the membership fees. Her rorting covered several branches over a four-year period.

Where did this self-styled underdog get the money? Between 1987 and 1997, Karen Ehrmann was the fundraising coordinator for the Townsville Table Tennis Association. The people of Townsville have a right to know: was any money meant for table tennis in Townsville spent on ALP memberships? This is just one question any alert and energetic person running an inquiry must answer. Of course, there are many more questions to be answered, and Townsville is not the only place where they should be asked.

Electoral corruption within the ALP is systemic, endemic and certainly not confined to the rank and file in Townsville. Yesterday I provided the Criminal Justice Commission with a copy of a document which purports to be an internal discussion paper prepared by the Socialist Left in 1994. Among other things, it alleges that electoral fraud has corrupted local preselections for council wards and State electorates right here in Brisbane. The submission itself states—

"... forging of enrolment cards, false address enrolments and suspected alteration of ballot papers clearly demonstrate that there are elements in the Party who are prepared to go to the extremes of committing criminal offences in an effort to win ballots."

Time expired.

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