



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 5 September 2000

ELECTORAL FRAUD

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (5.58 p.m.): I move—

"That, in view of the conviction of three ALP identities for electoral corruption by rorting the electoral rolls for Federal, State and Local Government elections, this House calls upon the Queensland Government to amend the Electoral Act to require proof of identity and address from all voters before ballots are cast, and calls upon the Commonwealth to amend the Commonwealth Electoral Act to require proof of identity and address before a person may be registered on the electoral roll."

The ALP stands accused of electoral corruption from within its own ranks.

A Government member interjected.

Dr WATSON: I will talk about Brisbane and about the member opposite in a moment, too. In 1994 the Socialist Left claimed that forging enrolment cards, false address enrolments and alteration of ballot papers clearly demonstrated there were elements in the party who were prepared to commit criminal offences in an effort to win ballots—their words, not ours. They claimed that electoral fraud had corrupted local preselections for council wards and State seats right here in Brisbane. They went on in some detail about the vote rigging shenanigans within the ALP through indiscriminate issuing of multiple ballot papers and letterbox pilfering. They also raised serious concerns about the incorrect and untenable decisions of the ALP disputes tribunal in dealing with their complaints. This is the same tribunal that claimed Karen Ehrmann was as pure as the driven snow. But the complaint was not about Townsville; it was about our own backyard in Brisbane.

In 1997, senior members of the Labor Left and the Socialist Left told the Sunday Mail that branch stacking, vote rigging and ballot paper fraud were rife throughout the ALP. They claimed there was a floating population of people who could be put into any electorate in Queensland—their words, not ours. They said there was a lack of willingness within the executive to tackle the problem. The member for Woodridge would know all about that from his time as State secretary. He was the bloke who was running the show with a very large broom and carpet.

Four weeks ago Karen Ehrmann claimed she was just a bit player in a much bigger game orchestrated by the AWU throughout Queensland. She said she was pressured and bullied by people in positions of power. She said branch stacking and electoral fraud were common practice throughout Queensland. She said it was known and encouraged within some factions of the Labor Party at the highest level, although of course she never named the Deputy Premier. These are not our allegations; they are hers—Labor's former candidate for Thuringowa, the candidate for whom the Premier campaigned until she was nailed by the Federal police. That is what she said.

Ms Ehrmann claimed she had actually witnessed the forging of electoral enrolment forms in Mundingburra and Thuringowa. She said some of those involved were directly linked to a prominent ALP figure, although she never named the member for Townsville.

Mr Reynolds: What are you saying?

Dr WATSON: I said "she never named the member for Townsville". Does the honourable member want to take objection to that? If he wants to stand up, that is fine.

Mr Dalgleish: You said "prominent" anyway.

Dr WATSON: I said "a prominent ALP figure". In sentencing Ehrmann to three years' jail, Chief Judge Patsy Wolfe said—

"The crimes you committed affect the confidence of the citizens of Australia in their democratic processes. It cannot be put too highly. You, at the end of the day, had interfered with the integrity of the electoral roll. The integrity of the electoral roll is sacrosanct."

This is the bottom line: the integrity of the electoral roll is sacrosanct. The Labor Party has violated that trust, year in and year out, for at least a decade.

The Premier wants us to believe that this was an isolated case. He wants us to believe that the ALP is just a little bit corrupt, but in truth it is rotten to the core. It is rotten in Townsville and it is rotten in Brisbane. It is rotten from top to bottom. Ms Ehrmann was the third of three ALP members convicted on 79 counts of electoral fraud. I have not the slightest doubt that others will follow.

We cannot undo the past. We cannot go back and change the results of every council, State and Federal election corrupted by the ALP over the past 10 years—that is ancient history—but we can fix the future. We can take steps to ensure that it does not happen again. The first and most logical step is to tighten up the enrolment and polling requirements. That means proof of identity and address to register and to vote.

The Beattie Government does not have a good record in that regard. The Premier and Attorney-General have been stonewalling Commonwealth plans to stiffen identification requirements since December 1998. It is easier to file a fraudulent electoral form than to hire a video, but the Beattie Government would rather set up its own electoral roll than agree to Federal reforms. It is not fair dinkum.

The Premier has tried to justify Labor's recalcitrance by quoting the initial reservations expressed by the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. The problem is that they are no longer valid. They are no longer valid because they were based on the official assurances that electoral fraud was not a major problem and a preliminary concern that the Commonwealth's requirements were unduly onerous.

Since then it has become apparent that electoral fraud is rife in the ALP, and the Federal Government has refined its proposal to ensure no-one is disfranchised. In other words, there is now a clear need for these reforms and no valid objection. All that is required is a witness and some kind of identification. Nearly anything would do—a drivers licence, a student ID, a Medicare card or whatever. That can hardly be classified as onerous.

In fact, we believe the Commonwealth should go further. The proposed reforms relate only to the point of enrolment, but the level of corruption highlighted by the Karen Ehrmann case provides a compelling argument for proof of identity and address at the ballot box. Anything less is second best. The integrity of the electoral roll is sacrosanct and so is the integrity of the ballot box. Both are essential to the proper administration of democracy. Both are essential to the integrity of the next election.

That brings me to my next point, that is, the Premier's promise to go full term. That promise was not contingent on exceptional circumstances or any external influence. It simply relied on the confidence of this House. The Premier's letter to the member for Nicklin states—

"I note your strong support for stable Government. I also restate my own commitment to stable Government, intent on serving a full term so it can tackle unemployment. Accordingly, I indicate my support for a resolution to be moved by you to the effect that outside the fall of the Government through a successful motion of no confidence the Government will continue in office for its full term. There would be no election held before May 2001."

The Premier's promise that there would be no election before May next year unless this Government lost the confidence of the House was made to secure Government. I call on the Premier to reaffirm that promise tonight. I call on him to rule out any early election on any other basis. I am calling for a cast-iron guarantee that he will not run off to the ballot box before we know the full extent of electoral corruption throughout the ALP.

The Courier-Mail thinks the Premier is kidding, but we know better. He has had his finger on the panic button since Karen Ehrmann went to jail four weeks ago. He has put the team on red alert. He does not care about breaking his promise, because the alternative could be even worse. He is already gearing up for a pre-emptive poll, which would deny voters a chance to make an informed judgment about the full extent of corruption within his Government. An early election would be an admission of guilt. It would be an admission that Labor could not win once all the facts were known. The Premier claims he has nothing to hide, so there is no excuse for going to the polls early. Queensland voters are entitled to know before they cast their vote whether the ALP is just a little bit corrupt or rotten to the core.

This House has already called on the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee to investigate the best way to minimise electoral fraud. The Premier supported that motion

and he is morally obliged to implement its recommendation before the next election. The committee will report on 14 November, so there is no excuse for going to the polls early. An election now would be a total waste of taxpayers' money, because no-one could have any confidence in the result. What we are doing tonight is pushing for greater confidence in the result of the next election.

Karen Ehrmann has already admitted that she and her Labor colleagues had no compunction about rorting the roll, and there is no guarantee that anything much has changed. The next election is likely to be won by a handful of votes in a handful of seats, including those in Townsville and Brisbane, where the stench of corruption is overwhelming. The people of Queensland are entitled to know the facts. They are also entitled to know that the next election is fair and square. I commend the motion to the House.

Time expired.
