



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 17 October 2000

CONFIDENCE IN MR SPEAKER

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.10 p.m.): I rise to second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. It is now beyond dispute that the ALP has routinely corrupted the electoral roll. The Shepherdson inquiry has also been told that the ALP corrupted the Electoral Commission. Now we find that the ALP has effectively corrupted the Parliament of Queensland.

The Speaker has applied his rulings with a capricious partisanship that has belied any semblance of political impartiality. He has actively conspired with the ALP to shield Labor members from the blowtorch of public scrutiny. We have seen him day in, day out looking to the Treasury benches for direction on how to treat the coalition's questions. It comes as no surprise to anyone in this House that the Speaker is a key member of the Deputy Premier's team in the corrupt AWU faction. This is not the first time the Speaker has shown his political colours. In June, we revealed that the ALP was using his office as a campaign headquarters for the Government Whip and member for Chermside, another member of the AWU faction.

An Opposition member interjected.

Dr WATSON: There is absolutely no question. We have got it. The ALP's list of Labor candidates showed that the Whip's campaign director was none other than the Speaker's office manager, Stirling Hinchliffe. The document we released at that time showed that Mr Hinchliffe had been running this campaign out of the Speaker's office for at least six months.

Mr Elder: You are pathetic.

Dr WATSON: That is what their documents show. Mr Hinchliffe was caught red-handed. He was caught out using the office phone, the office mobile, the office fax machine and the office computer for party political business on the taxpayers' time, at taxpayers' expense. Without any other consideration, those actions alone constituted a gross contempt of this Parliament and a blatant misuse of publicly funded resources.

A Government member interjected.

Dr WATSON: We released them at the time. There it is, out of the Government's own ALP records. There it is: the telephone number—work and home—the mobile number, the fax, the email. They are all there in their own documents.

The political neutrality of the Speaker's Office is one of the cornerstones of our democracy. It is a fundamental principle of this Parliament. Mr Hinchliffe crossed the line and should have been sacked on the spot, but the Speaker refused to act. In fact, he went in to bat for his factional lackey. He took the view that a little bit of corruption did not matter when the Government had the numbers. Given the growing mountain of evidence against AWU operatives, we cannot discount the possibility that Mr Hinchliffe may have been engaging in suspect activities similar to those being investigated. We have to recognise the possibility that the Speaker's office may have been used for the purposes of electoral corruption. That might at least explain the Speaker's heightened sensitivity on this particular subject.

Mr Elder: This is just an absolute disgrace.

Dr WATSON: It involved phone numbers, mobile numbers and email.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I find those words about the Speaker's office being used for those purposes offensive and I ask you to withdraw, because it is a reflection on the Speaker.

Dr WATSON: Mr Speaker, if you find them offensive, I will withdraw. However, I said that you have to recognise the possibility. I did not say that you are or were involved.

Government members interjected.

Dr WATSON: It is important. Which members of the AWU faction are clean? Those questions are legitimate public questions, particularly when they concern the institution of this Parliament. Whatever the extent of Mr Hinchliffe's conduct, it was clearly conducted on behalf of the AWU faction of the ALP with the full support of the Speaker himself. This goes to the very heart of our democratic process.

On the last day of sittings earlier this month, we saw the Government protecting the Speaker as he had protected it. We saw the Leader of the House use the ALP's numbers in the House to rip up Standing Orders and gag debate on a long list of individual dissent motions arising from a full week of arbitrary and capricious rulings made without neither rhyme nor reason.

The Government has good reason to protect this particular Speaker. He has a long track record of protecting Labor members. He has a long track record of acting as the Government's gatekeeper on matters of legitimate concern and privilege—matters that should have been referred to the relevant parliamentary committees for bipartisan consideration and adjudication. He has a long track record of relying on the Government's numbers to uphold his rulings in favour of the Government.

It has been a very long time since the Queensland Parliament was subverted by a more compliant, more partisan, more biased Speaker. This Speaker is a throwback to the bad old days of the "moonlight State".

Time expired.
