



Speech by

Mr DOUG SLACK

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard 21 June 2000

TREASURER'S PERFORMANCE

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (6.45 p.m.): The unplumbed depths of the Government's budgetary difficulties have been obvious for some time. They have been obvious to anyone who can add up. They are apparent even to the honourable member for Ipswich, despite the established fact that he qualifies as a Labor Treasurer by virtue of the fact that he cannot do his sums. What is more, the black hole has been obvious because of the Government's transparent determination to screw every last cent it can from Government owned corporations to get that money by the trough load through ruinous dividend payments and deadly equity for debt swaps.

It has been very obvious from the Government's determination to penalise its own agencies through the Beattie assets tax. Of course, it has been obvious most recently and famously—infamously, in fact—from the Treasury driven desperation to get the motorists of Queensland to fork out the money, or some of it at least. I refer to the cunning plan—I should say the not-so-cunning plan—to introduce the Beattie petrol tax, the 8.3c a litre petrol tax that you have when you are not having a petrol tax.

Dr Watson: It followed the Beattie stealth tax.

Mr SLACK: Exactly. It is a Clayton's scheme—another one—from a Clayton's Premier and from a dud Treasurer—the word that has been used so often in this House. That little rort, like the Treasurer's political reputation and like the Budget he is about to foist on 3.5 million ill-served Queenslanders, is now a dead duck—in its present incarnation at least.

But let us look at the Beattie petrol tax. It says a lot about how this Labor Government has its hand in everybody's pocket. It says a lot, too, about the real level of expertise and political nous resident on the benches opposite. It is something much less than a net bet, that is for sure. It is symptomatic of this disastrous Government's pea and thimble sleight of hand trickery when it comes to dealing with the people. If this mob were running a two-up school, it would be run out of town. The Beattie petrol tax may have disappeared for the moment because of the public hue and cry it raised, but it will return if this Premier and this Labor administration win Government next time. It ditched the principle of equity. That is what we have to remember.

The Government offered \$150 off the cost of rego to most Queenslanders and \$180 to the rest, who live outside the south-east, in return for a whacking great increase in the price of petrol. It made no attempt to achieve equity. That alone reveals it as the naked revenue grab it was planned to be. It entrenched the principle of non-equity in another way, too. The rego rebate would have been withheld from people who renewed their registration prior to 1 July—another double-dip by the robber barons opposite. How does the Treasurer explain that one if it was well thought through? If it was not, it was obviously a grab for revenue.

There are a number of other indications that this Government is absolutely desperate to find money to replace the funds it has wasted by misadventure in its first two years in charge of the piggy bank—the funds that would otherwise have maintained Queensland's previously rock-solid financial status. As my colleagues have said and as Standard and Poor's has said, the \$1.2 billion has gone down the gurgler, along with \$350m from the general Government sector and \$850m from the PTEs.

A lot of this information is anecdotal, because one of the real skills that this Labor Government has is to put the frighteners on people who might complain or simply raise a question about procedures or demands. My understanding is that it is becoming somewhat difficult to get moneys owing from this Government unless a person is a member of the favoured Labor nomenclature. Perhaps this is not surprising given that the cupboard is bare, but it is a disgraceful dereliction of duty by this Premier, this Treasurer and these Ministers in relation to those for whom they work and to whom they will ultimately answer: the people.

A lot has been said about the strong financial position that Queensland is in. If one goes back to the years when the coalition was in Government one will see that Queensland held the strongest financial position of any State in this country. That was the inheritance of the Goss Government. To give the Goss Government its due, it did not manage the finances too badly. The problem now is that Moody's and people in our community are very seriously concerned about where our State's finances are going. That was no more evident than in what happened with the sneaky way in which the Treasurer tried to introduce a petrol tax into this State—a petrol tax based on a false premise, a premise that the oil companies were ripping off the people of Queensland by not passing on the rebate. There is plenty of evidence around to say that that is a fallacy.

Time expired.
