



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 17 May 2000

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Ms H. Ringrose, Mr B. Carbon and Minister for Fair Trading

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.37 a.m.), by leave: The Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party have used parliamentary privilege to attack and defame Helen Ringrose, the Deputy Director-General of my department; Barry Carbon, the head of the EPA; and Judy Spence, the Minister for Fair Trading, on a range of matters. All of these people have been exonerated by the CJC.

The CJC has said in its findings that the evidence "does not give rise to a reasonable suspicion of official misconduct by any person in connection with the appointments" of Ms Ringrose or Mr Carbon. In addition, in the first allegation, the CJC found no evidence of impropriety by anyone and that people had acted lawfully. In the second allegation, the CJC found that neither I nor anyone else had been improperly involved in the appointment. Those inquiries would have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to taxpayers. That is a waste of taxpayers' money which could be better spent on education, health and police.

The Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party have used parliamentary privilege, often referred to as coward's castle, to defame these good people who are unable to defend themselves in terms of the public servants. Today both the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party should have the political courage and decency to stand up in Parliament and apologise to those people. My challenge to Mr Borbidge and Dr Watson is to do just that—stand up in this Parliament today and apologise to those public servants whom they defamed under privilege.

The Leader of the Opposition is now trying to do the same thing to Robert Schwarten. By the way, I table for the information of the House the challenge I issued to Mr Borbidge on 12 May calling on him to apologise to these two public servants, which he has not yet done. As I was about to say, the Leader of the Opposition is now trying to do the same thing to Robert Schwarten. Let me make it clear: the conflict referred to here should never have happened. I have said that publicly and I say it again today. But it did happen. However, it was resolved by the two individuals having a sensible discussion. It was resolved in the Australian way. After they had resolved their differences—

Mr Borbidge: With a firing squad behind them.

Mr BEATTIE: Yesterday he wanted an explanation. I am giving it today. The Leader of the Opposition continues to be rude and disrupts this Parliament. He cannot have it both ways. He wanted an explanation. I am giving it.

Mr Borbidge: You wouldn't answer a question yesterday.

Mr BEATTIE: Let the record show that the Leader of the Opposition continues to try to disrupt this Parliament to bring it into disrepute in the community. As I said, the matter was resolved by the two individuals having a sensible discussion. It was resolved in the Australian way.

Mr Borbidge: The Labor way!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am going to hear this statement. I warn the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr BEATTIE: As I said, it was resolved in the Australian way.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Warrego will cease interjecting.

Mr BEATTIE: As I said, it was resolved in the Australian way.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Mr BEATTIE: As I said, it was resolved in the Australian way. After they had resolved their differences—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I am happy to wait until those opposite settle down. After they had resolved their differences, one of them withdrew a complaint. I say it again: that is the Australian way, where people sit down and resolve their differences.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: It is the Australian way, where people sit down and resolve their differences. Let us be clear about this.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I intend to listen to this statement. Order, the member for Callide!

Mr BEATTIE: Those opposite show no respect for this House. They continually use it to try to disrupt—

Mr Borbidge interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Okay. It shows how little respect those opposite have for the Parliament. Let us be clear about this. No politician spoke to the police about this matter, outside of the Police Minister—

Mr Borbidge interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Let the record show that those opposite wanted an explanation yesterday. I am trying to give them one. All they have done is try to disrupt it, the whole lot of them. They try to disrupt it because they have no respect for the institution of Parliament, absolutely none at all. Let us be clear about this. No politician spoke to the police about this matter, outside of the Police Minister as part of his normal duties, as he told the House yesterday—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Callide will cease interjecting.

Mr BEATTIE: As I was saying, no politician spoke to the police about this matter, outside of the Police Minister as part of his normal duties, as he told the House yesterday, and of course the Minister for Housing. In terms of my involvement in this matter, I spoke to the Minister for Housing and I publicly explained to the media that he advised me that he was simply defending himself. I now find the mischievous argument that being publicly accountable and explaining this to the media on their questioning is to have in some way interfered in this matter. That is a nonsense. That suggestion is also an attack on the free media, on the right of the media to pursue me, and an attack on the independence of the Police Service.

It is Mr Borbidge, the Leader of the Opposition, and some sections of the media who are now trying to interfere in police operational matters. As I have said before, the Minister for Communication and Information, Local Government and Planning had this involvement. He attended a meeting with the two parties at his own instigation. He asked the member for Rockhampton if he wanted him there, as one of his closest—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! We are going to hear this statement.

Mr BEATTIE: I have released a public statement to this effect. As I said in that statement, the Minister for Local Government had this involvement. He attended a meeting with the two parties at his own instigation. He asked the member for Rockhampton if he wanted him there, as one of his closest personal friends. The Minister attended at his own expense and in his own time.

Mr Borbidge: Did you know he was going?

Mr BEATTIE: Indeed, it is a mad, mad world when listening to their nonsense. Why is there so much angst about all this? Do members know why? Because it was resolved and Mr Borbidge does not have the political opportunity to score cheap points, and he is hurt, as are some sections of the media. When two parties resolve their differences, as I explained to the House, I regard the matter as closed. I think any sensible person would.

I recall some time ago there was a hit song that went something like this. It was Sultans of Swing. There is an adaptation, and it refers to the Leader of the Opposition— Sultan of Sleaze. That is exactly what we have seen—Sultan of Sleaze. He comes in here and defames people. When he is

found out, he will not apologise. There is hardly a line in the press about it. He defames innocent people. He is the master and the sultan of sleaze. He will throw it and get in the gutter, but when he is wrong, does he apologise to innocent people? No. Let the people make a decision about his cowardice in this matter.
