



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 18 May 2000

CENSURE OF MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS AND MINISTER FOR HOUSING

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.58 p.m.): I move—

"That this House censures the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing for his assault on Mr Craig Brown, the husband of the Federal Labor member for Capricornia."

By any standards, the lack of standards of the Beattie Government is absolutely breathtaking. By any standards, the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing should have had the decency to submit his resignation as a Minister of the Crown and a member of the Executive Council.

We have seen an extraordinary series of events that raises very serious questions as to how far this emerging scandal goes across the Beattie Government. This morning in this place we saw the incredible defence by the Premier, who referred to an incident that happened in 1976 to justify his lack of leadership in the year 2000. Things have changed a bit since then. The circumstances relating to the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing are the most serious actions relating to ministerial propriety that we have seen in this State since the Fitzgerald inquiry.

We have seen the assertion by the leader who will not lead, by Mr Beattie, that a king hit was self-defence—that someone can have a crushed beer can in their hand and assault someone and call it self-defence. I understand that the eyewitness accounts of the incident indicate very strongly that Mr Brown did not hit the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing, that it was an assault on the part of the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing.

I also understand that the investigating police officer determined in his report that there was justification for a charge of assault occasioning bodily harm to be laid against the Minister. If the Minister had been charged and convicted, he would have ceased to be a member of this place. Of course, then the Government would have to negotiate with one of the Independents in order to continue to occupy the Treasury benches.

Let us ignore all of that. Let us go through some of the other sins of the Minister who, I understand from the speaking list put forward by the Government Whip, does not intend to participate in this censure motion against him tonight. Once again, the Parliament and the Opposition are giving the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing the opportunity to come clean—the opportunity to respond. He is treating this Parliament with so much contempt that he has not even fronted the House for his own censure motion. That is treating this Parliament with absolute and total contempt.

Let us look at some of the other allegations against the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing. There is a suggestion in the police report that the Minister's office gave the police inaccurate information as to his whereabouts when they wanted to question him. So the Minister lied to the police—and that is acceptable under the standards espoused by the Premier and the Labor Party. The Minister's office, the Minister, or people acting on the Minister's behalf lied to the investigating police and said that he was not in town. Subsequently, the police saw him down the street.

The Minister said that he would be available for interview at 6 p.m. Then, of course, he had another excuse—he was changing his legal team and they could not get to Rockhampton by 6 p.m. So again we had a deliberate pattern of evasion on the part of the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing.

We have a situation where the Premier did not tell the truth about the seriousness of the charge. The Premier peddled the untruth that it was only common assault. If the Minister was convicted of mere common assault it would not affect the Government's majority on the floor of the House.

Mr BEATTIE: I rise to a point of order. The comments made by the Leader of the Opposition are untrue and they are offensive and I seek for them to be withdrawn.

Mr BORBIDGE: I withdraw, but let it be on the public record that the Premier's office was background briefing the press gallery in this place that it was only common assault. I guess it is a bit like some of those phone calls—he did not know what people close to him were doing. I say this to the Premier: no-one believes him anymore. His credibility is in tatters.

We have the incredible example of the Government calling in the flying psychiatrist, the Minister for Local Government and Planning. It was the Opposition who exposed the secret meeting in Mackay where a deal was not done—they merely settled things in the Australian way. One can call it whatever one likes, but when people have different points of view, and when there is a situation in which one party is pressing for criminal charges against another and at the end of the meeting that particular person decides not to proceed—or ask the police not to proceed with those charges—I guess one could be polite and say that we have an agreement. I would have thought that it would have been a deal.

Is it not interesting that everyone who was at that meeting had a pivotal role in terms of the faction plays within the Labor Party in regard to the endorsement, or the continued endorsement, of the Federal member for Capricornia and the wife of the gentleman who was assaulted by the Minister, Mr Craig Brown.

This is as serious as it gets. Let us get back to the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing. Let us accept that the Premier is an innocent party in all of this. The Premier acted on the premise and on the advice that the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing was not the person who threw the punch. The Premier said that the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing acted in self-defence. Aside from anything else, on all the evidence available, that is a lie. The Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing lied to his Premier—unless the Premier was part of the cover-up, anyway; unless the Premier decided that he would go along with this incredible and particularly serious charade.

The fact is that over the last few days we have seen an appalling lack of standards on the part of the Government and the Premier. The Premier says that it is the Australian way. Is it the Australian way to use a king hit as self-defence? Is it the Australian way to lie to the police about one's whereabouts when the police want to question one in respect of an indictable offence that would disqualify one from being a Minister of the Crown and a member of Parliament? Is it the Australian way not to tell the truth in respect of the seriousness of the charge that the investigating police at the Rockhampton CIB were recommending against the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing? Is it the Australian way to call in the flying psychiatrist, the Minister for Local Government—the man who fixed everything in every Labor Government that he has served in? This is the Minister who gave up a Saturday morning to go up to Mackay with Mr Slowgrove to sit down with a Labor barrister from Rockhampton, to sit down with Mr Brown and to sit down with the Minister. What was offered and what was threatened?

Why did the circumstances change so dramatically after Mr Brown supplied photographs to the police and after he turned up so that the police could take photographs of the very serious injuries that he sustained? Why was there a change of mind? Why are we expected to believe what Mr Brown now says—"It was all a misunderstanding. I want to get on with my life." This shows an absolute lack of standards by this Government and this Premier.

Time expired.
