



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 22 August 2000

ELECTORAL FRAUD; MS K. EHLMANN

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.50 a.m.): Honourable members should not underestimate the gravity of developments in Townsville over the past week. What we have are admissions and allegations coming from prominent members of the Labor Party in Townsville that corrupt electoral practices may have had a bearing on not only the preselection of Labor candidates but potentially the outcome of the 1995 general election, the outcome of the 1996 Mundingburra by-election and the outcome of the 1998 general election.

The key issue in relation to Labor's electoral corruption scandal is how far the stench extends and how ambitious and how well practised the corruption became. We know the plot to cheat the voters went at least as far as the party's most senior official, then Labor Party President Don Brown, now a member of the State Industrial Relations Commission. After Labor's disputes tribunal in December 1996 totally cleared Karen Ehlmann of any wrongdoing in the Thuringowa preselection battle, he said—

"I am prepared to say, with my hand on the Bible, that fraud did not happen."

After the 12-hour disputes tribunal hearing, the Labor president said with no ifs, no buts, no qualifications "fraud did not happen". Within months there were 80 criminal charges. Between them Karen Ehlmann and Shane Foster entered guilty pleas in relation to over 60 of those charges. Yet after hearing the matter the State President of the Labor Party said that "fraud did not happen". I sincerely hope that Mr Brown now gives considerably greater attention and brings considerably greater honesty to his quasi judicial role in his "jobs for the boys" appointment as a State Industrial Relations Commissioner.

There must be equally grave doubts about the honesty of the then State secretary of the party, the current member for Woodridge. He was in the thick of that disputes tribunal process. His claim now that Labor could not get to the bottom of it because it did not have the powers and the resources of the Australian Federal Police is a cop-out and an excuse. The disputes tribunal did not need coercive powers to understand what had been happening in Thuringowa, in Mundingburra and in the seat of Townsville. It had in front of it material adequate to reach that conclusion. The member for Woodridge would not want to try to tell Terry Gillman or Mayor Tony Mooney, for example, that it did not have adequate material in front of it to make an accurate assessment of what had gone on. It had sworn statements.

Who was on the disputes tribunal? Of course we had the State president, the now State Industrial Relations Commissioner. We had, I understand, the then State Secretary of the Labor Party, the member for Woodridge. We had the returning officer for the corrupt Thuringowa preselection, Joan Budd, employed by the Deputy Premier, the head of the AWU faction in this Government and in the Queensland Labor Party. Also in the firing line is the member for Townsville, the Premier's right-hand man in the north. It is totally inconceivable that the honourable member did not know what was going on. It is equally inconceivable under all the circumstances that he was, in fact, not in the thick of the action.

Mr REYNOLDS: I rise to a point of order. I find that comment offensive and untrue, and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! The member finds the comments offensive. I seek a withdrawal.

Mr BORBIDGE: I note the sensitivity of the honourable member. Out of respect for the Chair, I will withdraw.

What we had was a preselection candidate in Thuringowa in Ms Ehrmann who was so confident that she had stacked her own branches well in terms of winning her own ballot that she could spare the member for Townsville some of her phantom votes—some of her Labor ghosts—to help him over the line in his preselection battle with the Mayor of Townsville, Councillor Tony Mooney. Some of her phoney Labor members were "transferred", in branch stacking parlance, from branches in Thuringowa and Mundingburra into the seat of Townsville for that specific purpose, and the honourable member says he did not know anything! It is the Sergeant Schultz defence: he knows nothing, hears nothing, sees nothing. He just wants to benefit from everything.

Mr REYNOLDS: I rise to a point of order. I find the comments made by the Opposition Leader offensive and untrue, and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I ask for a withdrawal.

Mr BORBIDGE: Out of respect for the Chair, I will withdraw, but as much has been conceded in the District Court. The honourable member might be able to get me to withdraw, but he cannot change the court record.

Mr REYNOLDS: I rise to a point of order. I find those comments offensive and completely untrue, and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr BORBIDGE: If he finds it offensive that he cannot change the court record, I will withdraw it. I presume he thinks he can change the court record. That would be typical. They are used to fixing things.

Mr REYNOLDS: I rise to a point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Resume your seat. The Leader of the Opposition should get on with his speech. I have asked you to withdraw unequivocally without commenting on your withdrawal.

Mr BORBIDGE: I withdraw. One of the concessions Ms Ehrmann made in the negotiations with the Director of Public Prosecutions as she looked for a way of avoiding having these issues go to trial was that these "transferred" votes had the potential to support the current member for Townsville in his preselection battle with Tony Mooney. We have to ask ourselves: why would she do that? Was it out of the goodness of her heart? Was it because she did not like Tony Mooney, or was it because of a good old-fashioned Labor deal?

A document tabled in this place in 1998 may hold the key. That document said that there was a meeting of the Socialist Left faction of the Labor Party in Townsville at 5.30 p.m. on 4 June 1996 at the home of Tom Greenwood and his wife, Beverley Lauder, then vice-president of the Queensland ALP, in Hermit Park. At that meeting, according to the document, a motion was put and carried cementing a deal between the faction, then led by the current member for Townsville, and Karen Ehrmann to swap support in their upcoming preselection battles. The Socialist Left was preparing Ehrmann for Thuringowa in exchange for "loyal" Ehrmann votes in the seat of Townsville.

Mr REYNOLDS: I rise to a point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I do not think the member for Townsville was mentioned. There is no point of order.

Mr BORBIDGE: It is interesting to note how sensitive he is.

According to an attachment to the document, the current member for Townsville attended that meeting. That document was tabled in this place in 1998 and has never been disputed by the Labor Party. Of course, Ms Ehrmann had—or at least should not have had any—loyal votes in the seat of Townsville to offer the member for Townsville. Her branches—her legitimate membership, her legitimate votes in the party—were in the branches in her electorate, but that is not how it was. Ms Ehrmann had enrolled people in her branches without their knowledge. She paid their membership dues and she shifted them around by forging enrolment forms to whatever address suited her political purpose of the moment.

So the only loyal Ehrmann votes on which the Socialist Left and the member for Townsville could rely were, by definition, Ms Ehrmann's ghosts—her illegitimate voters. The member for Townsville and the Socialist Left would have had that very basic understanding from the beginning. So it is just preposterous, whatever way one looks at it, to suggest that the member for Townsville did not know what was going on. But it is not only the role of the member for Townsville—

Mr REYNOLDS: I rise to a point of order. I feel that the comment that has been made by the Opposition Leader is offensive. It is completely untrue, and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I ask you to withdraw.

Mr BORBIDGE: I understand—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Just withdraw.

Mr Horan: He did know what was going on.

Mr BORBIDGE: He did know what was going on. So I will withdraw the comment that he did not know what was going on and I will accept his assurance in the House that he did know what was going on.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Resume your seat.

Mr BORBIDGE: That is what he has just said.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Let us get on with the debate. Withdraw unequivocally, please. You have only got about one minute left.

Mr BORBIDGE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am agreeing with the honourable member. I have withdrawn the remark that he made.

Time expired.
