



Speech by
Mr TERRY SULLIVAN
MEMBER FOR CHERMSIDE

Hansard 9 November 2000

MR SPEAKER'S RULING

Motion of Dissent

Mr SULLIVAN (ChermSIDE—ALP) (11.10 p.m.): I rise to oppose the motion before the House.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr SULLIVAN: The member for Callide encourages me even more to oppose this dissent motion. On 18 October the member for Indooroopilly asked a question without notice, and the wording of the question is important. It states—

"I refer the Premier to the ALP's decision to sack Mr Lee Bermingham as a senior organiser because a party investigation found he was guilty of interfering in an internal ballot of an affiliated union."

The next part of the question is the important bit. It is a bit long, but it states—

"Can the Premier inform the House why his beloved ALP and the member for Woodridge were perfectly capable of investigating irregularities in union ballots but failed to show anything like the same expertise or enthusiasm for allegations of electoral corruption?"

The only way the Premier could have answered the second part of that long question would have been to actually refer to evidence before the Shepherdson inquiry. There is no other way the Premier could have answered as to why he believed the ALP or the member for Woodridge did not fail to do that. The only way he could have answered that would have been to refer to evidence before the Shepherdson inquiry. And that, as members opposite are well aware, would have been in direct contravention of the rulings of Speakers Fouras, Turner and Hollis, based on Crown Law advice.

This question was not a general question about Lee Bermingham. The member for Crows Nest a short time earlier said, "You let some questions in; you don't let some questions in." That is perfectly correct. If answering the question meant that the sub judice rule would be contravened, the question was ruled out. If an answer would not contravene the sub judice convention, the question was ruled in. It is simple.

As a former Premier, the member for Crows Nest would know that the questions worked out by the Opposition are not just randomly selected and randomly thrown on paper. The Opposition works out very carefully what its questions say and it would know, given the rulings of Speakers Fouras, Turner and Hollis, what would or would not be allowed.

Very conscious of the clear rulings by Speakers Fouras and Turner on sub judice, Speaker Hollis did what he should have done—that is, recognised that the question would have forced the Premier into addressing evidence before the CJC's inquiry. He then called the Clerk for further immediate and specific advice on the sub judice convention. Acting on this advice, he ruled the question out of order. Indeed, Mr Speaker made this clear by stating—it is in Hansard—

"I have accepted the advice of the Clerk."

Without batting an eyelid, the Leader of Opposition Business, the member for Indooroopilly, moved dissent from the Speaker's ruling. In doing so, he unfortunately followed the example of his leader, the member for Surfers Paradise, who has continually displayed a lack of respect for Parliament and its practices. While parading himself as some master of parliamentary debate, the member for Surfers Paradise white-ants this place continually. At least the West Indian termite attacked only the physical fabric of this place. What the Opposition Leader is doing is taking the soul out of the Parliament.

Mr Nelson: You don't mean that.

Mr SULLIVAN: I do mean what I am saying. If the member for Tablelands had any respect for what this Parliament stood for, he would be voting against this dissent motion as well.

This House might be interested to learn that during the 49th Parliament the Speaker has had to call members to resume their seats on 293 occasions. On 94 of those occasions it was the Leader of the Opposition who defied the Chair. He would not accept the ruling from the Chair and had to be asked to resume his seat. On almost one third of all those occasions there was an attempt by the Speaker to maintain order in response to disruption from the Leader of the Opposition. The next worst offender, of course, is the mouth from the north, the member for Tablelands. The member was asked to resume his seat 28 times. But of course those occasions came in little bursts, because he gets a little bit of a rush to the head and then he goes back to sleep.

This dissent motion was born not of a genuine grievance at the Chair's ruling. The motion of the member for Indooroopilly is part of a culture of disrespect and disregard for the authority of the Speaker and this institution. It has started to become just part of the culture that Mr Borbidge will defy the Chair and Mr Beanland will move dissent. Here we have the member for Crows Nest also jumping to his feet in the same way.

The ruling from which those opposite tonight have moved dissent is expressly based on advice from the Clerk. It was on advice from the Clerk that the Speaker gave his ruling.

Mr Littleproud interjected.

Mr SULLIVAN: The member for Western Downs can yell and shout all he wants, but all he has to do is refer to Hansard, or refer to the tape if he actually wants to hear it. If he does, he will find that the Speaker took advice from the Clerk.

Mr Littleproud interjected.

Mr SULLIVAN: We are not talking about some days; we are talking about a dissent motion. I thought the member had been here long enough, but he has gotten lazier the longer he has been here. Maybe he did not even look up Hansard. For his benefit, I point out that this occurred on 18 October. The member for Western Downs should come back to earth. On the specific occasion about which the Opposition has moved dissent, the Clerk's advice was sought. Taking the Clerk's advice, the Speaker made a ruling.

The member for Crows Nest tried to worm a way out for the Opposition by saying, "We are not really saying anything about the Table Office staff or the Clerk." That is rubbish—a deliberate falsehood. The member for Crows Nest knows that this is a direct attack on the Clerk and the Table Office staff. The member for Crows Nest is so low that he attacks the staff of this place.

Mr COOPER: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find his remarks offensive and untrue, and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Chermside will withdraw.

Mr SULLIVAN: I withdraw. When the advice of the Clerk was expressly sought and the Speaker took that advice, the Opposition immediately moved a motion of dissent, without any reference back to the Speaker. What the member for Crows Nest said is an absolute farce. He has deliberately done it. He has deliberately attacked the Clerk. He has no respect for the Table Office staff here.

Mr COOPER: He has done it again, Mr Speaker. He has claimed that I have made a direct attack on the Clerk. I was defending the Clerk and, as such, I find his remarks offensive and false, and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr SULLIVAN: I withdraw. The Opposition's attack is a deliberate attack on the Clerk, because the advice was sought specifically from the Clerk, as is shown in Hansard. Those opposite can squirm and squeal all they want, but Hansard shows that that advice was sought. I will even let the member for Caloundra see it if she wants.

One would have thought that Opposition members might have learnt their lesson from the last week's sitting and the infamous no confidence motion, but they are here again dragging down the institution of Parliament, clutching to the Speaker and the Clerk on their way down. Their behaviour is a disgrace. The motion is a disgrace. It needs to be defeated. I oppose the dissent motion.
