



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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FOUR-YEAR PARLIAMENTARY TERMS

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (6.30 p.m.): When the Victorian people decided in May 1984 that they would move to a four-year term, the then Leader of the National Party in Victoria said that this was the 'most important constitutional amendment that has been made in the Victorian Parliament for approximately 30 years' and that it was the 'result of intelligent cooperation between the three parties in the Victorian Parliament.' What we have before us tonight is an opportunity for all members of this parliament to come together in an act of intelligent cooperation, but to do so requires leadership. It requires leadership from government. It requires leadership from the Liberal Party, which it has demonstrated here tonight. It also, finally, requires leadership from the formal opposition.

New South Wales moved to four-year terms in 1981. That means that four-year terms have operated in New South Wales for 20 years. I have to tell the member for Yeerongpilly that the traditions of the National Party on this issue predate the enlightened views of Russell Cooper, because in 1981 Mr Punch, the then leader of the then Country Party, said—

The Country Party support the concept of a 4-year term of Parliament. Such a step will secure a better standard of government for the people of NSW.

If the Country Party 20 years ago thought this would secure a better standard of government for the people of New South Wales, why can its counterparts in Queensland not support such a thing for the people of Queensland? Mr Punch said that four-year terms would bring 'more stability in planning legislation' and 'give any New South Wales government more ability to develop long-term economic policies, untied to short-term political trends'. He also said that they would reduce the number and frequency of elections and the cost of those elections. I point out that the then leader of the then Country Party made those comments in New South Wales at a time when there was a Labor government supporting the referendum and in power.

Similarly, Victoria has had four-year terms for 17 years. The Victorians moved in this direction in 1984. The then Cain government did so with the support of the National Party, when the leader said, as I outlined earlier, that it was the result of 'intelligent cooperation'.

I suggest to the Leader of the Liberal Party that in leading this debate it is not enough to come in here haranguing the Premier and haranguing the Labor Party on this issue. Our support for a fixed four-year term is public. It is on the record. The Premier's amendment tonight puts that beyond any doubt. The Premier's amendment clarifies unequivocally the support of the Australian Labor Party and the Labor government for this proposition.

It is now up to the Leader of the Liberal Party, in my view, to do the hard yards with his coalition partners.

Mr Quinn: What coalition partners?

Ms BLIGH: If the Liberal Party aspires to ever be in government, it will need a coalition partner. I know that the National and Liberal parties are not formally in coalition, but they are parties on the conservative side of politics. I would suggest that—

Opposition members interjected.

Ms BLIGH: Our position is on the record. Our position is stated clearly tonight. What is not on the record is the views of the National Party. The Leader of the Liberal Party could bring much to the table if he could bring his conservative colleagues with him.

I urge the Leader of the National Party, who has not yet had an opportunity to speak in the debate—he may hopefully surprise all of us—to break with the past of the Queensland branch of the National Party. I know that the circumstances he finds himself in as leader must have him looking for opportunities to find a new image. Leadership requires the ability to tackle tough issues, but it also requires the ability to approach new ideas with an open mind. His counterparts in other states 20 years ago—two decades ago—tackled this issue and did so in the interests of the people of their state.

Mr Foley: Is this a test of Mr Horan's leadership?

Ms BLIGH: It could well be a test of the leadership of Mr Horan.

Is it a radical move? No. What I am urging the National Party to do tonight is play catch-up—catch up with 20 years of National Party thinking in other jurisdictions. He should take a leaf out of his colleagues' books. I echo the words of the previous speaker in that it will not be the people in this parliament who will decide this; it will be the people of Queensland. When they get the opportunity to do so, it will require all of us in this parliament to have a view and to express that view. I encourage the Leader of the National Party to surprise us all here this evening and put his support on the record.
