



Speech by

Mrs J. SHELDON

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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SITTING HOURS; ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mrs SHELDON (Caloundra—Lib) (12.13 p.m.): I do not intend to go over issues that have already been raised, but before and during the last election campaign the Premier made quite a point about 'reforming the parliament'. They were his words. Part of that reform was that the House would not sit after 7.30 p.m. One reason behind that is the large number of women now in the parliament with families, particularly young families. The Premier said the parliament was going to be more family friendly and, if necessary, sit more often but not sit after 7.30 p.m. Again and again we have seen that proposal changed because it happens to suit the government. Where are the deeds to back the Premier's rhetoric? There has been no reform whatsoever. Unfortunately, it has gone backwards. Instead of delivering to the people of Queensland the reform that the Premier said he would, only three months into this government we find absolute arrogance.

Last night I came into the House to speak on a particular clause to a bill. That is any member's democratic right. The responsible minister got to his feet and thoroughly abused me for doing that because I had not spoken on the bill during the second reading debate. Members do not have to do that. I came in to speak on a particular clause and to support an amendment that had been moved by the opposition. I had real reasons for supporting it, reasons that were important to my electorate. Yet he abused me for taking up the time of the parliament to do that. That is what this House is about. Members are elected to represent their constituents. Hopefully this parliament is here to uphold democratic principles, but more and more we see that that is not the case. For any effective democracy there must be an opposition and opposition parties that are allowed the right to speak in the House.

Today we are seeing another negating of that right. It has been mentioned that when we were in government members of the opposition had the opportunity to move a motion every night and debate it, and they did. We have the opportunity to debate one a week. Private members' bills were always dealt with on a Wednesday night, and that occurred. Under this government, debate on such bills is not even allowed to go ahead. More and more we are seeing the running of this parliament by the executive arm of government, in direct contradiction to the doctrine of the separation of powers. There is supposed to be a clearly effective, and seen to be effective, separation of the executive and the parliament. Because this government has 55 members—

Government members: Sixty-six!

Mrs SHELDON: Rather, it has 66 members. No doubt it will soon be 55 or less. Because this government has so many members, it has decided that that sort of democratic principle no longer stands. The member for Stafford talked about democratic principles. Democratic principles relate to the right to freedom of speech, the right for people to stand up and make points in the House as elected representatives and the right of opposition parties to be heard, not gagged. Yet he is supporting what is virtually a gagging of the rights of private members in the House today to be able to debate private members' bills—less and less debate, more and more interference.

This is a sorry day for the House. Queensland has a unicameral parliament; it has no upper house. We have a government that is bloated in numbers and is showing complete arrogance because of that. The losers in all of this are the people of Queensland, because there is no democracy in the House. It is ruled by the executive. The sooner that that change is put in place and changes are implemented by the Premier, Mr Beattie—whose words were 'I will reform the parliament'—the better for this place.

Mr Springborg: He certainly did.

Mrs SHELDON: I can assure the member that the reform is no reform. It is backward steps. It is back to the future by a Labor government that has decided that it is no longer answerable to the people of this state or their elected representatives. It is answerable only to itself, only to the executive arm of government.
