



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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SITTING HOURS; ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (12.01 p.m.): After listening to the ramblings of the honourable member opposite I have been incited to make a contribution. I do not know what he is on, but I do not want to be on it. I have sat in this place now for about 12 years and I have listened to a lot of things and I have heard these debates go backwards and forwards and all over the place. It is quite obvious to me from the contribution of the honourable member for Stafford that he is living up to the old adage of the Labor Party, that is, to be absolutely and totally revenge driven.

Since 1995 in this parliament we have seen some significant reforms that provide opportunities for members of parliament to be able to participate and to be able to represent their electorate. The motion that has been moved in this parliament today is turning back that opportunity; it is taking us back to where things used to be in the past. At the end of the day, if the government wants to live in the past we can all live in the past. However, we are talking about living in the future.

The honourable member opposite stood here a moment ago and talked about a couple of ministers in the Borbidge government who answered seven and eight-minute questions. Sure, they might have done that but, as was pointed out by the member for Warrego, come 10 past 10 with regard to the private members' statements, the Speaker cut off our ministers and allowed the opposition the opportunity to participate and to give their speeches that they needed for their media opportunities and to represent their electorates.

I sat in here for the six years of the Goss administration as well. I remember former Premier Goss and a range of his ministers, including Ed Casey, treating this place with absolute contempt. They took 20-odd minutes to answer questions. If honourable members want to go back and look at the history books, they will see that many interesting things are written which they may choose to overlook for some reason or another, whether it be sublime ignorance or whatever. At the end of the day that is the record of that particular administration.

We are talking here today about going forward and we are talking about filibustering. That is a tactic that is perpetrated in this parliament by all sides of politics, and it is going to be used in the future. At the end of the day, some of the incidents that the honourable member for Stafford talked about occurred as a consequence of the arrogant mishandling of this parliament by the former government. If they drop something in here on Tuesday—a significant bill that has major implications for many electorates throughout Queensland—and expect that it is going to be debated and passed two days later and they suspend the standing orders to allow it to be debated, then they are going to have a fight on their hands. We will continue to fight that.

There has been no deliberate slowing down of the parliamentary process by the opposition in this term. In actual fact, we have been extremely constructive. If honourable members look at the bills that have gone before this parliament, they would see that at least 80 per cent, if not 90 per cent, have been passed with the bipartisan support of all members of this parliament. The other interesting thing is that generally only one or two opposition members have spoken to them and they have not taken their full time. That is an area where the parliament has worked reasonably well.

The honourable member talks about people coming in here reading speeches and not having a clue about what they are talking about. He should have a look at his backbench; they cannot even pronounce the words. Come on! At the end of the day this parliament is a robust place. Members are supposed to be capable of coming in here, standing up on their own two feet and making some sort of

contribution, erudite or otherwise—and most of them are certainly not in the former category. Most of the members opposite do not have the capacity of individual intellectual thought to be able to make their own speech. If the honourable member wants to talk about that sort of thing, I have to say, as somebody said, those who live in glass houses should not cast stones.

The Borbidge government started some very significant reforms to the parliamentary process and, to the credit of the Beattie government, it enhanced some of those things in its first term. However, what we see now as a consequence of a 43-seat majority is a winding back of those significant advancements that have been made for proper participatory democracy in this state.

When we were in government from 1996 to 1998 there was an opportunity for us to make private members' statements in the morning and there was an opportunity for three Matters of Public Importance debates throughout the week. We have actually acceded to allow this government to wind that back to one debate, because we felt that we needed one quality debate during the course of the week. That is a significant concession on the part of the opposition. At the end of the day we have not conceded to the winding back of the opportunity for the opposition to use that time, which is recognised in the standing and sessional orders of this parliament, to debate private members' bills—something that is extremely important and has been an innovation of the past three or four years. We should not let go of it; we should hold it very, very dearly. There are private members' bills listed on the *Notice Paper*. There should be an opportunity for them to be debated.

No-one can say that this week is going to be a frustrating opportunity for the government because, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, we are probably going to debate in full and pass through this parliament at least six bills today. That is significant. We dealt with three bills yesterday, although there was some major contention with them. There were times in the previous sitting week when a great range of bills went through parliament. While there is always a degree of urgency in government legislation and government business, it does not mean that the government should come in here and take away the ever-reducing opportunity for the opposition to make a significant contribution.

The honourable member for Nicklin feels very strongly about the bill that he introduced into this parliament. I feel strongly about mine. I think it could have been debated last week or we could debate it this week. I do not want to see the opposition deprived of the first real opportunity to sit past 8.30 in the evening to debate private members' bills. I do not want to see the opposition and non-government members deprived of the opportunity to have their say on private members' bills, which on every occasion to date has been provided to the opposition. It has not been sought to be expunged or modified in any way. I think that that is a very, very sad indictment on the way in which this government is operating.

The real concern for the people of Queensland is that what we are seeing is a growing arrogance of the Beattie Labor government. I would have thought that it would have taken somewhat longer than this to happen, but we saw it start to happen in the first few days and weeks of this government's term. Now we are three or four months down the track. Of course, the Premier is going to go out there, wring his hands, clutch his heart and tell people how he is a good bloke and, 'You can trust me. I'm really good. I smile a lot,' and all of that sort of stuff. A lot of people are taken in by that and they do not see the way that he is running the parliament. They do not see the lack of opportunity that has been provided to the opposition. They do not see that the opposition has generally been extremely constructive in the way that it has debated legislation that has been passed in this parliament. He will go out there and he will talk about all these wonderful sorts of principles. It is not a matter of 'do as I do' for the Premier, it is 'do as I say'. It is all smoke and mirrors, as the Leader of the Opposition said. It is all this process of obfuscation so that nobody really knows what is going on, so that he can push things here and there. When he is put on the spot down the track, he will create another diversion.

If this motion is passed today it will be a very, very sad indictment on this parliament. It will mean that something that has been established for a number of years in this parliament—progressive reform by the Borbidge-Sheldon government and also by the Beattie-Elder government—is now being wound back.

We can all hark back to the old days, but there is no good reason for this motion today. As the Leader of the Opposition said, if parliament sits tomorrow evening more bills will be passed. I have just given an indication to the Attorney-General that three bills of importance to the proper administration of the Corporations Law will be able to pass through all stages of parliamentary debate in a cognate debate in a matter of five or 10 minutes. The government cannot accuse us of not being constructive. If the government runs this furphy argument that the parliament cannot operate because of the number of bills on the *Notice Paper*, it needs to be judged by that. That argument is a complete and absolute furphy, because we are getting through government business. However, the government should not seek an excuse to come into this parliament and constrain the operation of the opposition by saying,

'Look, we've got all this additional government business to actually get through.' There is no problem in that regard.

The other sad indictment on this government is the fact that I have never seen such appalling administration of the *Notice Paper*. What appears on the *Notice Paper* when the sitting winds up for the evening bears no resemblance to what appears on the *Notice Paper* the next day. One would expect some small degree of change on the *Notice Paper*, but item No. 20 becomes item No. 1 and item No. 12 becomes item No. 2. It is all over the place. The government has proven itself almost completely incapable of administering the parliament and running it properly. That has not been the case previously when the member for Chatsworth, Terry Mackenroth, or the member for Kedron occupied the position of Leader of the House, nor was it the case under any other Leader of the House. This is an appalling maladministration of the business of the House. It is about time the government started to sort out where it wants to be and where it wants to go. Surely there can be a small amount of change to the order of government business on the *Notice Paper*, but not the depth of change we see day after day after day.

The motion before the House today is the first chink in the armour. It will be the first wedge driven into winding back the opportunity for the opposition to have a real chance in this place. I do not think we should take that step. There is no good reason for it. The government can try to invent all the excuses it wants, but none of them stands up to effective scrutiny. What will happen next? Does it want to take away the opposition's opportunity to raise issues altogether? Will it come to us and say, 'You give notice of a motion in the morning and debate it at night. Maybe we shouldn't have any of those.'

The situation today is that the opposition did not have the chance to give notice of a private member's motion. Sure, the last four minutes of the allocated time for that matter were spent debating this issue, but every day the time for ministerial statements is stretching to 10 past 10, 12 past 10 and 20 past 10. The opportunity for non-government members to be able to expose government deficiency is being wound back. That is very sad. The only way this place can operate effectively is when there is effective opposition scrutiny and an opportunity for those who sit in the gallery and the media to hear what non-government members, and also what government members, have to say on issues that affect their electorates.

This motion should be opposed absolutely because it is the thin end of the wedge. It winds back the significant and effective parliamentary reform that has occurred in this state over the past five years. It is a backward step. It is something which probably appeals to the revenge mentality of the member for Stafford, but it should not appeal to the mentality of anyone else in this parliament.
