



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 20 June 2001

LANG PARK

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.54 p.m.): I move—

That this parliament notes the Minister for State Development's conflict of interest as a member of state cabinet that has already made a decision to proceed with the Lang Park redevelopment exercising his call-in power to adjudicate any appeals and ride roughshod over the local community.

Further that this parliament condemns the Beattie Labor government for this blatant abuse of its executive powers.

If ever there has been an example of the ongoing and growing arrogance of the Beattie Labor government, it has been the decision by the minister to call in his powers under the act to stop the appeal process of the Anglican Church and a group of people represented by a person in an area near Lang Park. This is a great display of arrogance and dictatorship. The Lang Park project was first raised in 1993. A sum of \$110 million was spent on building a new grandstand to provide total accommodation at the stadium for some 40,000 people. Now we are seeing another \$280 million-plus being spent to complete the redevelopment of the stadium to provide seating for another 14,000. At the same time, people are screaming for roads, water, dams and all the rest of the necessary and urgent infrastructure needed by the state.

This debate tonight is about the way that this arrogant government, with its dangerous majority, has walked over the parliament and the new way of accountable government in this state. The Integrated Planning Act 1997 provided for the call-in powers, but it provided for it under very special circumstances involving projects of state significance such as those relating to mines, power stations and so on. Those cases involve major development where urgently needed jobs are being created and it is necessary to use such a power as time is of the essence.

This is the first time under this act that the government has used its call-in powers for a project of its own. The power has been used once before by Mr Elder in the matter of Australian Country Choice and the new meatworks and processing plant that it was building at Cannon Hill. That is the only time that it has been used before where the applicant was not the government.

What we are seeing here is the government trying to act as Solomon on its own developments. One has to ask the question: why is it the minister for State Development? Why is it not the Minister for Local Government, who administers the act, or the Premier? The explanations of the Integrated Planning Act by the adviser to local government were that, conventionally, the minister identified in this section is the Premier. As the definition is inclusive, it would appear that either the minister administering the IPA or the Premier may exercise the powers under this division. Once again the Premier wants to step aside, the Minister for Local Government does not want to do it, and it has fallen to the Minister for State Development.

The Minister for State Development is absolutely welded to the decision by cabinet to proceed with this project regardless of who has appealed and regardless of what information is put before him. There is absolutely no way that he can go against the decision that has been made by cabinet. He is a long-time member of the Labor Party, and this was their policy at the last election. He is a member of the Labor caucus that has made the decision to proceed with this project. He is a member of the cabinet that has decided to proceed with this project. He knows that the demolition of Lang Park has commenced. In fact, he was here today when a bill was passed by the parliament that in fact puts in place some processes that enable the Coordinator-General to pass on the completed projects to

whichever entity will actually own and run them. There is absolutely no way that he can make any other decision but to rule out the appeal.

In this new era of accountable politics and accountable government in this state, where people are given the chance and the opportunity to have their day in court and justice is seen to be done in a way in which the government does not in a heavy-handed manner force what it wants on the people who object to it, this is just a total abrogation of all those principles. The fair process, the opportunity for the little people to have their day in court and to be able to have their appeal heard—all of that has been thrown out the window.

The old Local Government Act was subject to abuse, and we have heard about that, but that has gone. The old Local Government Act has been replaced by changes in the Integrated Planning Act, which was introduced during the nineties. It was put in place in such a way that it would actually provide a principled way of carrying out these particular sorts of projects.

As I said, we have a minister who is absolutely welded to this project. We saw a budget brought down in the parliament yesterday that listed \$119 million of funding. There is an air of mystery surrounding this project. The Premier says that no public money will be spent on this project, but then we have an additional tax—the increase in the pub tax—and the Treasurer stating that it would raise about \$14 million a year in its first year of operation. The mystery continues.

Is someone else going to build it or is the government going to build it? Is the government going to provide the money and then be reimbursed by somebody else? Is it going to come to some particular arrangement with the Brisbane City Council? No-one seems to know. No-one will stand up and say, 'We are just going to build it ourselves. We are going to use public money. What we said before about using no public money was an absolute lie. We are just going to build it as a straightforward project that will be held, contained and owned by the government and we will hand it on to the Lang Park Trust.' No-one will stand up and honestly say what they are going to do.

Under the Integrated Planning Act, one of the things that has to happen is that, once the minister has had a look at the appeal and examined it—supposedly in a fully independent way—that report has to be tabled here in the parliament. Everyone in this House knows—

Mr Mackenroth: Why is that?

Mr HORAN: That is what it says in the act. His report has to be tabled.

Everybody knows that that is going to be an absolute farce. We all know what decision the minister is going to make. If you could back a horse in the Melbourne Cup at those odds, no other horse should even bother turning up. They are unbackable odds on what the decision is going to be.

No doubt this government could well feel frustrated with the project that they want to go ahead with. Obviously they want to go ahead and carry out the project. Say it was a big industrial project. Say a major smelting aluminium company was saying, 'We are looking at Queensland and we are looking at Malaysia. If we can't get this through within a certain time frame, we are going to go elsewhere.' If they went elsewhere, we would lose a major project of tremendous significance along with thousands of jobs. That is the sort of thing for which we need these call-in powers to expedite a particular process. The government wants to go ahead with this project; it is not going to walk away from it. If it is a matter of a few more months, yes, perhaps there will be inconvenience in regard to the completion of the project, but they are not going to lose the project in the same way that they could lose a big aluminium plant that might go to another country. They have said that they are going to go ahead with this project. They are determined to do it. They would not lose the project if they went through the normal appeal process in the court, because they have control and ownership of the project.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr HORAN: You will get your turn.

We say that we are going through an absolute charade and an absolute farce. Everybody in Queensland knows that this is only going to be a staged act and everybody knows what the decision is going to be. I know that the minister will get up and say, 'I am going to look at it carefully.' I would like to hear if there is any chance that he is going to stand by the appeal and the project will not go ahead. However, there is no chance of that, and that is the principle that is behind this motion. It required only one more step in the process. Yes, it would have been inconvenient and it would have been difficult, but the government still had ownership of the project.

The minister is supposed to be independent and he is supposed to be coming up with a decision that we need on this whole process. It should have been principled; it should have been ethical; it should have been honest; and it should have demonstrated that this parliament has matured to honest, accountable government. Members opposite can say all they like about the past; this is 2001, when we do have an act that does set guidelines and protects the little people who want to have their day in court. It is a sad and sorry day for the Beattie government that they have trampled over

those people, that they are going to take an autocratic, dictatorial, arrogant decision and just ram through the decision they want, regardless of what anyone else wants.

Time expired.
