



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

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STANDING RULES AND ORDERS

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.52 p.m.): A number of the items that I was going to raise have been canvassed already by a number of speakers. It was interesting to hear the previous speaker talk about having decency in this debate. I think that today we all came into this House prepared to display some decency in this debate. That was destroyed by the Premier's precious, pathetic little performance this morning simply because he was hurt by some of the interjections and processes that occurred during question time. If anything demonstrated that we should have a strong, robust and democratic parliament, it was what happened this morning. We asked a question of the Treasurer regarding allegations of certain matters that were believed to have happened within the Government Superannuation Office. The Treasurer said that he had no knowledge of it. It was not until an opposition member injected and asked, 'Is there a CJC inquiry?', that the Treasurer changed his mind and said that he was aware of that and said that he had misinterpreted the question. Later on in a subsequent answer the Treasurer apologised to the parliament.

That is a classic example of how the cut and thrust and parry and interjection of this place can keep some honesty and accuracy in the debates in this parliament. The Premier comes in here with his show-pony acting performance. He turns his back to the opposition like a beaten boxer and is not prepared to take the interjections or the criticism from this side. The opposition takes it. We accept it. We cop it. Occasionally we stand up in this place and say that we want something withdrawn because we find it personally offensive, but that is part of this place. The pressure that is applied to the government is designed, under our parliamentary system, to maintain performance.

As an opposition, we have to do two things: we not only have to examine, find something that is wrong and then criticise but we have to apply pressure to the government so that we can lift its performance. In recent days we have talked about matters such as non-performance and cuts to capital works. The next day the minister came into this place and made a statement in defence of what the government is doing in terms of capital works. Yesterday we had a strategy against the Minister for Families. That was another example of pressure being applied to a minister and the way in which this parliament works. I have no doubt that the minister and her department are saying, 'We have to make sure that we get some more money; we have to make sure that we get some more staff. We do not want any more of this.' That is the way in which this place works. Sometimes the strategies are successful; sometimes they are not. Sometimes they are average; sometimes they are good; sometimes they are bad. But it is the robust way in which this place operates that applies the pressure and which is the essence of this parliament. It allows people to be represented.

There may be 11 members from the National Party and 66 members from the Labor Party in this current parliament. However, as National Party members we represent thousands of people. We have every right to push our point of view, divergent as it may be from the view of the government of the day. That is what this parliament is in danger of losing when this precious Premier will not answer a question properly. When we ask him to answer the question, or we interject on him, he just turns his back and says, 'There they go again, Mr Speaker. They are wreckers. They knock, knock, knock. They are wreckers. They interject. They are rude.' I think that everybody is starting to notice—particularly the media—that the Premier does that every time he is in trouble. This morning he was in trouble. It is the coward's way of getting out of standing up, facing the music and answering the question straight, just like all the rest of us have to do.

Although there is not a lot of time left before we break for lunch, I want to comment on some particular issues contained in these motions. At the outset I want to say that the opposition is supporting these motions. I think that it is good that we are getting clarity and formality into these three issues of the sub judice convention, the procedures for raising and considering complaints and also the declaration of pecuniary interest.

I remember an issue relating to pecuniary interest when the coalition was in government. The Labor Party opposition challenged a member—I think he was a farmer—when we were having a debate about irrigation. At that time the Labor Party opposition challenged that member's right to be involved in that debate. I think that this motion sets it out quite clearly. One of the important things in the recommendation about the declaration of pecuniary interest is that the matter of such a pecuniary interest is to be greater than the interest held in common. We could take the pecuniary interest question to extremes. For example, there may be a member whose husband or wife is a teacher. Does that member have to declare that when we are debating legislation that relates to teacher accreditation? We could take the issue of pecuniary interest to silly lengths. So I think that good notice should be taken of the fact that the interest is to be greater than the interest held in common. That could apply to members who have a business interest—or the members of their family could have that business interest—in a retail operation, or a farming operation, or some sort of contracting arrangement. But good commonsense should be used.

This will mean that members of parliament will have to make sure that they know what the bills that they vote for are about. That means that if members happen to be at a meeting with constituents, receiving a briefing or something like that, and then leave that meeting to rush down to the chamber to vote on legislation, they have to know where they stand on the legislation and whether they have a pecuniary interest in it.

I think that the issue of the sub judice convention is good. It means that we know clearly that, in matters of criminal trials where juries are involved or civil trials where juries are involved, the sub judice convention applies. Generally speaking, outside of those matters, we have a clear ruling that will be put into the standing orders so that we know exactly where we stand.

On behalf of the opposition, I say that we support these recommendations and congratulate the committee on the work that they have done in working through them. It has taken some considerable amount of time, but I think that it will help us to raise the standards of how we go through these three particular processes.

I will conclude on the matter of standards and say that we should not forget that this is a place where both sides have to be tested. We should ensure that, when we have a robust debate, as parliamentarians we do not turn our backs on the debate and try to overtake the true role of the Speaker. The real leveller in this place is the independent, straight down the middle principles that apply to the Speaker of the House. The Speaker of the House runs this place. The Speaker of the House should be able to make decisions about the behaviour of members from the government side or from this side. The Speaker of the House should be able to make decisions about the rules of this House as they apply under the standing orders. That should be left to the Speaker of the House. If we try to overtake the Speaker's role and try to direct the Speaker without any true respect, then this House will lose the true democracy that it is all about.
