



Speech by

PETER LAWLOR

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

Hansard 29 May 2001

MONCRIEFF PRESELECTION

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (11.45 a.m.): I wish to draw the attention of this House to a situation regarding factionalism and branch stacking in the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party has recently tried to portray itself as the conservative alternative to the Labor government. We have heard about the termination of the coalition agreement, and in a recent admission from the Liberal Leader in the Bulletin of 21 May, he said—

There's no doubt that being in coalition with the National Party over a period of time has meant that there have been some compromises and perhaps those compromises haven't been in the best interests of the Liberal Party.

That would have to be a contender for the understatement of the century. Honourable members should have a look at the result that the coalition gave to the Liberal Party: three members. The report continued—

Mr Quinn said he hoped the formation of the management and reform committee, which replaced the state executive, would put an end to the factional brawling within the party.

Some hope! This hope was apparently expressed after one of the most blatant examples of branch stacking and factional bias ever seen in this state, and that was in the recent preselection ballot for a Liberal candidate to replace Kathy Sullivan in the federal electorate of Moncrieff. The Liberal Party is quite happy to take a swipe at the Labor Party over branch stacking and factional politics, but when it comes to their own party they are happy to sweep it under the carpet. That happened in Ryan. That is a good example as no-one in the Liberal Party has had the courage to suggest a real change which would prevent a recurrence of that situation.

I was told by a Liberal Party member who attended the vote on the preselection, 'You blokes know nothing about branch stacking and factions compared to the Liberal Party.' He then proceeded to tell me what had happened. Just while we are on the subject of the Liberal Party 'sea change' and 'rejuvenation', as Mr Quinn refers to it, honourable members should have a look at the field that stood in the preselection for Moncrieff. What a motley crew!

From barrier one there was Jim MacAnally, McPherson federal electorate council chairman. Out of 250 votes in the first round he received four. He was a party hack, eliminated in the first round. From barrier two there was Bill O'Chee, the former National Party senator and recent Liberal convert who left politics with \$1.4 million after winning one election. He was also eliminated in the first round with 11 votes.

Mr Lucas: Eleven votes?

Mr LAWLOR: He got 11 votes, and he was lucky to get that many.

Former mayor of the Gold Coast Ray Stevens, a former National Party member and a member of the Liberal Party for less than 12 months, was also eliminated in the first round. From barrier four was John Mason, described as a local party identity—whatever that means. Supported by both the outgoing member, Mrs Sullivan, and the state leader, Mr Quinn, he survived to the second round but ran a distant third. From barrier five was Ian Solomon, a Southport person with a conviction for counterfeiting who survived to the second round but ran a distant second with 63 votes. The winner from barrier six was Stephen Ciobo, who obtained 129 votes in the second round. He claims to be a local but is completely rejected by the Gold Coast Liberals.

As to the rejuvenation or reform referred to by Mr Quinn—how about this article, which again comes from the *Bulletin*—

Mr Ciobo can forget about any support or campaign tips from his predecessor, outgoing MP Kathy Sullivan. Mrs Sullivan is suing Mr Ciobo, claiming defamation, and refused to be photographed with him after the win.

The basis of the Gold Coast Liberals' dissatisfaction with the preselection process in Moncrieff is their belief that the branch was stacked in favour of Mr Ciobo. Unlike Ryan, where voters flew in from London, Hong Kong and so on, these voters were young, well organised and came from all around south-east Queensland. There are about 100 of them, and they voted as a block for Mr Ciobo. Most of them had never been seen at branch meetings, but they were there to vote for Mr Ciobo. I quote from an extract from a letter to the editor—and this is a typical attitude down there—from Mr Derek Howard of Ashmore. He states—

I attended the Liberal Party preselection meeting for Moncrieff. While very pleasing to see so many young members in attendance, I was disturbed to note most of them sitting in what appeared to be a large, well organised vociferous group.

It is interesting to note who organised that large, vociferous group—none other than the odious and discredited former member for Clayfield, Santo Santoro. Notwithstanding that Mr Santoro lost one of the safest conservative electorates in Queensland—admittedly to a brilliant ALP candidate—he is still playing the king-maker in the Carroll faction.

The outcome of this preselection has precipitated mass resignations from the Liberal Party on the Gold Coast. Mr Quinn should not be so hypocritical in relation to factions and branch stacking and should recognise that his party will never be free of these elements whilst the likes of Santo Santoro remain in his party. There will be a mutiny on the Gold Coast with the Liberals standing an Independent candidate. When referring to two candidates at the preselection meeting, the *Bulletin* said—

Stevens and Solomon are like flies buzzing around a dead body.

How correct it was: it is the body of the Liberal Party killed by hypocrisy, factions and branch stacking.
