



Speech by

**Hon. K. LINGARD**

**MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT**

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Hansard 8 October 2003

**DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES; CHILD ABUSE**

**Hon. K. R. LINGARD** (Beaudesert—NPA) (6.48 p.m.): The Families Department has now reached a period of continual attack not just from the opposition but from the whole of society. Quite obviously, this minister has to decide when it is necessary to step down and allow an outside body to have a look at this department. Any criticism now—any criticism of the government, any criticism of the department—is met with a personal attack, as we have just heard from the member for Rockhampton. Any questions of the minister are now met with a personal attack about what the coalition government might have done or did not do in 1997-98.

Quite obviously, the coalition government followed a period of six or seven years of an ALP government and at that time we were able to say that we had done better than the ALP in money terms. Quite obviously, we did and quite obviously the next government spent more money. We have to accept that. We have always accepted it. But now we just get this personal attack. We get the promises of money, which we see in the amendment. That is how the members opposite are answering the criticisms as a government.

We hear promises that things will be done, that the minister will go and see the CMC. I say to the minister that all of us who held that position received the same letter from the CMC. Two days later the minister tried to make a virtue out of a necessity when she said, 'I will go and see the CMC.' It was quite obvious from the letter that we would all be required to do that. All the minister tried to do was make a virtue out of a necessity, because all of us would be required at some time to go and see the CMC.

At this stage there is so much criticism. There are few checks on output. There are few checks on discontent. There are few checks on complaints. I ask the member for South Brisbane, who I know will speak after me: what about the problems at Saint Mary's? What about the problems that have been mentioned to the Premier? What about the problems that have been mentioned to the Minister for Families? People involved with this organisation are saying quite obviously in letters that all money has been squandered. This is very obvious. Money goes into that place from the council, from Family Services, from Disability Services and from church parishioners, who donate in good faith and think their hard-earned money will be spent on the homeless and needy. I am prepared to table the relevant letter, simply because something needs to be done about the complaints that are being made to the Department of Families.

If we continue to make these statements we will continue to cop personal abuse, as I have just copped from the member for Rockhampton and as I copped from the minister yesterday. Anyone who reads *Hansard* will know full well that, regardless of the question I asked, I would have received exactly the same answer that the minister practised in front of the mirror last night.

We have a very basic difference in our philosophical approach to family services. It has come from a long time ago. I know this from being the Minister for Families myself. I think the worst thing that ever happened was the Burdekin report. I note the member who currently occupies the chair. He reported on the children who were homeless and spoke about the government's need to look after all of these children. What did the ALP Goss government want to do? It wanted to reduce the number of people in the care of the government.

So a new protection act was brought forward by the Goss government which we disagreed with. We disagreed with it philosophically because we believed that it was putting the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff instead of building the fence at the top of the cliff. It was removing care and concern, care and custody, care and protection orders, which we did not agree with. It was trying to limit the number of kids who came under the control of the state because it was receiving criticism from people such as Brian Burdekin. I discussed that with Brian Burdekin, but there was no way he could stop it.

What the government had to do was limit the number of children. It had to drop places such as BoysTown, Piabun and Geoff Guest. It had to run with a policy of deinstitutionalisation—a policy we disagreed with. We disagreed with that protection act. Even though it was brought in by Anna Bligh in 2000, it has clearly not worked. That is why we are here tonight discussing what we are discussing. It was not a protection act we agreed with. For government members to stand there and criticise us for not bringing in a protection act is simply about trying to put the criticism somewhere else. This gets back to the personal criticism government members come up with all the time.

Let us talk about something that has happened in my area. People talk about the lack of recognition by the Queensland government of the sheer scale of disadvantage, risk and unmet need of vulnerable children and families in the region—lack of recognition by the Department of Families. Clearly something needs to be done. The minister needs to stand down so we can get the whole matter reviewed.