



Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Hansard 4 June 2003

PARLIAMENT OF QUEENSLAND AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2)

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition (11.30 a.m.): At the outset I indicate that the opposition will be supporting the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2003. I acknowledge that the Premier introduced this bill into parliament. I also acknowledge the willingness of the Premier to do a very important thing—that is, to respect the role of parliamentary committees in this place.

As all members will remember, the other night we had a debate in this place on a notice of motion which tried to overturn a decision made by that particular parliamentary committee at an earlier stage. I think I can say that the Premier—as I do—respects the role of parliamentary committees. We just cannot choose to refuse or ignore a recommendation of a parliamentary committee because it does not suit the political parameters of the day. What is the point of having a parliamentary committee look at particular issues and make recommendations if at some future time we turn around and completely ignore them?

The committee which I am referring to was the Select Committee on Parliamentary Entitlements, which was established in the previous term. I would like to draw the attention of honourable members again to the report of that particular committee. That is what we are acting on here today: a report of a parliamentary committee which comprised nine members of this place and was not dominated by the government. The committee comprised four government members, including the Treasurer, the Speaker, the Premier and the Deputy Premier, two members of the then opposition, the leader Rob Borbidge and the deputy leader David Watson, and three other members, including two Independents—Mrs Cunningham and Mr Wellington—and Mr Feldman, the then leader of the One Nation Party.

It was a genuinely bipartisan committee. I am sure the Premier would agree that it was a genuine bipartisan committee of the parliament. It was not dominated by the government. There were four members of the government, two of the opposition, two Independents and the Leader of One Nation who made the recommendation which basically gave birth to the legislation which we are debating in the parliament today.

What is that legislation about? The legislation is about addressing an anomalous situation which was identified by that committee at that time. That has not changed. It just so happens what we are debating today will affect the Leader of the Liberal Party, but it may very well affect at some future time the leader of some other party. Previously it would have affected the Leader of One Nation as well as the Leader of the Liberal Party.

What it basically sought to do was overcome the current definition of an office holder of this parliament in so far as the leader of a recognised party is concerned. The current situation, as I understand it, is that a party is recognised officially if that party has 10 members in parliament. What this bill before the parliament seeks to do is recognise the recommendation of that select committee which says that a party should be recognised if that party has more than 10 per cent of the vote. What is wrong with that? It was there to overcome anomalies that happen sometimes in our system, and that is that a party can sometimes get over 20 per cent of the vote and not necessarily gain more than 10 per cent of the seats.

What has fundamentally changed in the last two or three years? Not too much. Playing petty politics with this really will not behave us very well at all. It might be today that this legislation recognises a particular problem which is alien to the Liberal Party, but prior to the last election it was an issue for the Liberal Party and the One Nation Party. As I said, in the future, five or 10 years down the track and after two or three parliamentary terms, other parties who might be in a reasonably dominant situation in this parliament at the moment, through the way that the electoral system works—whether it is the vagaries of 'just vote one', whether it is the vagaries of what happens generally with regard to electoral cycles, where a party enjoys a significant number of votes but does not necessarily achieve that trigger point of 10 seats in parliament—might be affected. This legislation is about addressing a problem that has existed and has been quite properly identified in this parliament by an all-party parliamentary select committee—not only all-party but also comprising Independent members as well.

I commend the Premier for recognising his duty in adhering to the parliamentary committee process. I commend the Premier also for the open way in which he listened to me when I saw him about this issue. I said that we had an issue which was outstanding in that select committee report. I know that these things are open to the vagaries of politics; I respect and understand that. But we have to strip politics out of this because we are addressing this not only to deal with an issue which is apparent now but also an issue recommended prior to the last election—an issue that was apparent to two political parties, not just one. It may be apparent to more political parties at some future time. That may very well be the case because a party might be up there at one moment in time and it may be down here at another moment in time.

Another thing that we need to reflect on and also understand is that parliaments operate in interesting ways. We have Independent members and we have members of political parties. Whilst I suppose it is not unique to parties today because there are now more Independents, parties have a discipline associated with them. Also within a particular party are people who are responsible for specific areas, responding with their party's viewpoint about the way policy is being made in the state and stating their alternative view. Often recognition and resources need to go with that as well. That has always been a part of our parliamentary process and should always be.

I would urge members of parliament today to desist from playing politics with this. Sure, there are grandiose headlines that can be reported about it, but I would remind people once again that this was quite properly considered by an all-party parliamentary select committee comprising Independents as well in the last term where those people sat down and quite properly took submissions and considered this in the cool light of day. They considered this in an extremely bipartisan way and made some recommendations which deserve to be implemented by this parliament. Today they are going to be implemented by this parliament for good reason.

It is not good, I believe, just to change your mind because of some of the political vagaries of the day. If we are going to discard properly considered views of parliamentary committees, then why bother having them at all? The opposition has no hesitation whatsoever in supporting this bill before the parliament because it grew out of a proper process. Not only does this legislation fix an existing issue; it fixes future issues which quite properly need to be considered as well.