



Speech by

Hon. Robert Swarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Thursday, 16 February 2006

MR SPEAKER'S RULING: MOTION OF DISSENT

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing) (4.25 pm): There is an old saying that you can dress a goose up in a monkey's suit and pretend it is a monkey but at the end of the day it is still a goose, and this debate is a goose. The truth is that it does not matter how we dress this up. I notice a couple of old footballers on the other side. What happened yesterday would not be tolerated on a football field. I know the honourable member is a very good footballer, and as such he knows that at all times you obey the referee.

The previous speaker, the member for Robina, suggested that the fact that the Speaker was on his feet had nothing to do with it. It has everything to do with it. The most junior member of this parliament would be able to tell you that, having witnessed what happened to the member for Charters Towers, who persisted in standing while the Speaker was on his feet, that is an offence which carries removal from the parliament. That has happened in very recent times. They are the rules of this parliament. Dress them up in whatever manner you wish; that is a fact.

Every single member of this parliament, unless vision impaired, saw yesterday with their own eyes just that occur. The truth is that what we are seeing is some embarrassment by the opposition at having not paid attention in the morning. The Premier gave notice of his motion, and I subsequently moved my motion, which stated—

That notwithstanding anything contained in standing and sessional orders the Premier be permitted to move at 11.30 am today the motion of which he has given notice this morning ...

And there were time limits attached. To suggest that then casts aside that entire book is nonsense. Anybody who has been in this parliament for any period of time knows that to be the case. All that it talks about is what is relevant to allow that to occur. Quite clearly—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I did not interrupt you when you were talking. Just be quiet. You are a footballer and you are condoning—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order!

Mr SCHWARTEN: Your son played for Australia—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Minister!

Mr SCHWARTEN: Well, he interjected on me, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: All comments will be directed through the chair.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That would be great, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you could get him to direct his comments through you.

The reality is that standing order 70 was the very standing order that we are talking about. Standing order 70 would have prevented that debate going ahead at that stage had somebody raised that point. When I called 'aye' there were no 'noes' on the other side. No-one said that we should not proceed to have that debate without standing order 70 being cast aside, and that is effectively what the motion I moved after the Premier gave notice did yesterday. What we saw later was the opposition, like a bear coming out of

hibernation, waking up to the fact that we had changed the standing orders to allow this debate to happen. Then 'too late' she cried; on for the debate, trying to claw back some advantage after having lost that advantage. That is what happened—some embarrassment, some being caught out and all the rest of it. That said, in reality what then created the problem was that the Speaker stood and the member for Beaudesert refused to sit. That is what created the problem.

I remember when the honourable member was a Speaker. I was not a member of this parliament, but I know that he tossed out my old mate Tom Burns, I think for precisely the same thing. Tom was known for his robust behaviour.

Mr Rickuss: Tom wanted to go fishing.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Tom probably wanted to go fishing. In reality, Tom defied the Speaker. In that case, the Speaker was the member for Beaudesert, and the Speaker removed him from the parliament under the standing orders that applied on the day. Anybody who wants to argue with any consistency has a perfect example to try to argue here, because it is exactly the same situation. Just change the name 'Burns' to 'Lingard' and you have exactly the same situation.

One thing that was made very, very clear to this House by Speaker McGrady when he took the chair was that he would ensure that there was order in this parliament, particularly in the morning. At every opportunity—without fail, every single day—the opposition tries to disrupt the first part of the morning. The truth of the matter, I suspect, is that the Speaker could turf out members of the opposition every day. If I was sitting in the Speaker's chair, I would. The truth is that they test his patience, and I am not a person known for my patience.

The member for Charters Towers made that error last year. One would think that anybody with any capacity to learn would have learnt that the Speaker will not tolerate being intimidated by a member of this House standing on their feet while he is standing on his. That was pretty obvious then. It is stating the bleeding obvious, as they say, that the Speaker will not tolerate that and that anybody who does so will find themselves on the other side of the bar of this parliament.

Mr Livingstone: Any former Speaker would know that.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order!

Mr SCHWARTEN: Any former Speaker does know that. The member for Beaudesert certainly knows that that is the case. However, he tried it on, he pulled the Speaker on, just as you see a footballer do on the football field, and the referee punched him. That is what happened yesterday. If I was the member for Beaudesert, I would have let it go. I would have copped it sweet. But no, we had to come in here and have a dissent motion.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: More rudeness. I did not interject on any member over there when they were speaking.

In reality, opposition members want to have their cake and eat it, too. They want to say, yes, we have the right to dissent—and I agree with that, no problem. No-one is arguing that they do not have the right to dissent. I am saying that what they are dissenting about is wrong. They are actually dissenting about the right of a member to defy the Speaker; for a member to stand and stare down the Speaker. That is what they are defending here today and that is indefensible. That is indefensible, and each and every one of them should know that.

It does not matter what happened up to that point. I happen to think that what happened up to that point was absolutely according to Hoyle, according to the best of Erskine May. I have no difficulty with that. Leaving all of that aside, the very point at which the whole argument collapses is when the member for Beaudesert defied the Speaker and continued to stand in his place.

Now, if members opposite want to stand up for that, if that is the standard they want to set, if that is what they believe the kids in the gallery want to see, if that is what they think we are trying to achieve when we preach law and order, obedience of the law, looking up to one's elders—and all the home-spun favourites, which especially come out of the mouths of members opposite, more often than not—then, in reality, they set a very bad example yesterday and they are setting an even worse example today. It is bad enough to have done it; it is worse still to now defend it. It is captured in everybody's mind's eye here and everybody saw it on TV last night. I know for a fact that I am voting the right way today and so will every member on this side of the House.