



Speech by

## Hon. Robert Schwarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Wednesday, 29 November 2006

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### CENSURE OF THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

**Hon. RE SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (11.30 am): I move—

That this House notes the misuse of parliamentary privilege by the member for Callide and Leader of the Opposition, and censures him for his lack of commitment to upholding the high standards expected of his office and as a member of this House.

A couple of days ago I read an article in the *Courier-Mail* which involved you, Mr Speaker, that quoted the Chief Justice commenting on how great it was to get back the portrait of TJ Byrnes. As a fellow student of history, I congratulate you on returning that painting. The Chief Justice said that he discovered the whereabouts of the portrait through newspaper articles of the time, which he described as tomes of reliable journalism and reliable fact.

Can members imagine how it would feel if they were not members of this parliament and read headlines suggesting that they had been involved in roting simply because they had not bought a number of investment homes, properties or whatever over a period. Let us take, as an example, the member for Gladstone who is in exactly the same circumstance as the former member for Chatsworth. Imagine that one has only managed to scrape together enough money to buy an investment home and an ordinary home, and is then called a criminal under parliamentary privilege. Can members imagine what that feels like and can they imagine how future generations will judge those people. That is the only criteria that the Leader of the Opposition used—or misused—yesterday.

I draw the attention of the Leader of the Opposition to the statement that he made yesterday in the parliament when he said that he only managed to pay off the family home, yet only last year the investment property that Mr Mackenroth purchased was the subject of an article in the *Australian* newspaper. I believe that it was on 9 June that Sean Parnell recorded that it was lodged in the pecuniary interests register. The member was not even able to tell one skerrick of truth in that whole episode. There were, in fact, two properties and he only mentioned that he had a half share in one over that period of time. Again, there is no element of truth whatsoever.

What was Mr Mackenroth's crime? Mr Mackenroth and other members who were named had not invested in shares, housing, cattle or anything like that. I did not know that that was testament to being guilty of corruption. I think that most of the citizens that the member proudly says he is protecting would be horrified to learn that he can stand in here under parliamentary privilege and cast a smear and a slur over people in this state who have what would appear to be the means to buy extra properties or make other investments but have chosen not to do it. That is the logic of what the member is saying. It is dishonest, despicable and unworthy of his office.

Of course, there is a pattern here. This morning I heard the honourable member say that he had read this book.

**Mr Seeney:** Do you want me to tell you the page number?

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** Has the member read it?

**Mr Seeney:** Yes, I have. Go to page 45.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** It is page 92, from memory.

**An opposition member:** Why don't you just table it?

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** No, I value it too much. It was given to me by Di.

**Mr Seeney:** Did you get a mention?

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** The member should just wait a minute. She said—

One night I received a very late phone call from Seeney, who said he had heard that I was to be in Monto the next day. When I said that was correct, he said there was to be a hi-jacking of the train into Monto as a protest about the Goss Government closing the rail line, but his advice to me was to stay well away as it could result in adverse publicity for me. He was intending to stay well away also, and leave it to the 'hotheads'. I was rather pleased that Seeney seemed to be trying at least to be helpful and thanked him for his advice. The next day, during afternoon tea at the function I was at, I decided to go down to the railway station and see how the 'protest' was going. The sight of Seeney leading the charge and getting extensive television coverage for his efforts greeted me.

The night before the member had told her that he was not going to be there. Indeed, he said that he would leave it to the hotheads. She went to the afternoon tea and bang! She was slam dunked. That is how the Leader of the Opposition treats his own people. This morning he said that he has read this book, but what did he say when he became the Leader of the Opposition? He said that he does not know what Di McCauley has against him. How could he possibly read this book and not know what she has against him? There is page after page after page of why she is crooked on him, and she has very great justification for being so.

Here we see a pattern of untruth, and of course we know about that pattern of untruth. This morning the Premier outlined what the member said about his brother, which was untrue. In her article, Rosemary Odgers says that he is unrepentant about it. The member is lower than a dingo's droppings. He comes into this place and misuses the privilege of the parliament to besmirch someone's name simply because they happen to be the Premier's brother, and then he says that it is all part of a tactic. That is what we heard yesterday.

It is all part of a tactic and a pattern—a pattern of despicable dishonesty. The Leader of the Opposition does not have the stomach, the courage, the backbone or the guts to go outside this place—he has to walk only a few steps—and shout it from the rafters. I know what the former member for Chatsworth will do with him. He sits over there with a supercilious smirk on his face. He is a prime example of a bully. He is someone who can dish it out but cannot take it. I know that the member will—

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr Seeney:** You used to be better than this.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I remind members of the opposition that they have made a lot of interjections in the last six or seven minutes. I am not too sure if you want me to give the member more time to speak. I ask members to desist and listen to some of what the minister is saying.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** My view on this matter is that just because someone has been a member of this parliament, and a very successful one—and I am not just referring to Mr Mackenroth but to all the other people whose names were dragged through the mud yesterday—and has chosen not to invest in property, that person ought not to be subjected to such disgraceful, filthy, underhanded, despicable, slimy slurs.

**Mr Seeney:** Tut-tut!

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** The Leader of the Opposition can laugh at that all he likes, but the truth is these are people he is talking about. I say to the Independents here today that I know what this mob is going to do. The Liberals are not going to be as decent and as honest as Bob Quinn was when he condemned the opposition leader for the tactical lie. He said that the Leader of the Opposition should apologise to the parliament, the committee of this parliament said that the Leader of the Opposition should apologise to the parliament, and the Leader of the Opposition refused to do it. That is the sort of bloke he is. If I get it wrong, I apologise and I am happy to do so. I have got a lot of things wrong in my time, and I have apologised to the people concerned.

Each and every one of the Independents should cast their minds back to what happened yesterday. Where was the evidence that any of those people named yesterday deserved to have their name dragged through the mud? Where was the action that caused them to have their names besmirched and their families called into question in that regard? How would members feel if somebody else did that to them in this parliament?

I say to the Leader of the Opposition that the office he holds is very serious. He was in here this morning lecturing us about how he was going to stand up for the standards of the people of Queensland, and he told us what the people were talking about out there. I will tell the Leader of the Opposition what people tell me about him. I know what the National Party says about him. People whom I know who are rusted-on Nationals do not like the way he has behaved. They do not like the way he misuses his position in this parliament, and they do not believe it represents what conservative politics and good opposition is all about.

So, again, I say this to the Independents, especially those who have committed the cardinal sin of not investing all their money in big property, shares, investments and all the rest of it that these people say they must do to be a successful member of parliament who is not corrupt: here is your opportunity today to place on the record your dismay and disgust at the action of this person and the misuse of his position.

Time expired.