



Speech by

Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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CRIMINAL CODE (HONESTY AND INTEGRITY IN PARLIAMENT) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (8.44 pm): I rise this evening in support of the private member's bill introduced by the Leader of the Opposition, which introduces an offence to the Criminal Code of the deliberate provision of false evidence to this parliament by honourable members. The bill establishes the offence of providing this false evidence before the Legislative Assembly or a committee of the Assembly. The offence can be committed by an elected member or any other person. The offence is a crime and is punishable by seven years imprisonment.

This bill comes after the abhorrent abuse of the parliament by the then Beattie government in 2006 in which this House was used to exonerate the former member for Sandgate, Gordon Nuttall. In 2006 the then Attorney-General introduced a bill to the parliament that amended the Criminal Code to repeal section 57 of the code and remove the offence of lying to the Legislative Assembly or a committee of the Legislative Assembly. This was, of course, as a reaction to the CMC inquiry that found the former member for Sandgate had lied to an estimates committee about his knowledge of the 'Dr Death' scandal in Bundaberg. Members of the parliament have the responsibility of representing their constituency but also are accountable for the information that is provided to either the House or a committee of the Legislative Assembly.

The integrity of the government is in question now more than ever. In the last few months we have learned of the depth of corruption and cronyism that runs deep in this Labor government. Whether it is the former member for Sandgate and the corrupt payments he received and others or the appointment of certain officers in the state, this government's integrity has been compromised time and time again.

The Public Service in this state has been compromised. In the last few weeks I have found this to be the case. In dealings with various officers from a range of departments I have found that, at the very least, public servants have been gagged and instructed not to discuss any issues with non-government members of parliament unless it is arranged through the various ministerial offices. This is why, at the very least, a royal commission is needed—to look at the Queensland government and the way it manages the state and its affairs. As Wayne Goss commented on ABC's *AM* program 1 August 2009—

I think the longer any side of politics is in power the more risk there is that cobwebs will settle, and that's not a criticism of Peter Beattie; it can happen with either side of politics.

This government has set to turn around the perception that under a Labor government the accountability and integrity of government has been diminished. In August the Premier released a discussion paper *Integrity and accountability in Queensland*. In the foreword the Premier claimed that—

I want all Queenslanders to feel they have access to, and are part of, a healthy democracy in this State and I look forward to your contribution to shaping the future of integrity and accountability in Queensland.

However, when public submissions to the paper were released from the website large sections were blacked out and some were heavily censored until such time that the opposition pointed out the lack of integrity in the actual process. It cannot get even that right.

The introduction of this bill also follows a scathing indictment of the Queensland Labor government by Tony Fitzgerald earlier this year. Mr Fitzgerald commented that, after 12 years of Labor government, this state is run by mates for mates. Queenslanders were right to share the concerns of former Integrity Commissioner Gary Crooke and CMC Commissioner Robert Needham that something is seriously wrong with the way this government operates the levels of bureaucracy.

I have reviewed the integrity and accountability submissions into the corruption and cronyism of the government. There were some interesting submissions to say the least. One particular submission specifically recounted former Premier Beattie's recalling of parliament in 2005 to save the then minister for health, the former member for Sandgate, from prosecution for lying, amongst other things. His submission states—

The political culture that has grown in Queensland is, in many respects, worse than the weaknesses in institutions discussed—
in the Fitzgerald report—

This in turn leads inevitably to lack of transparency, an absence of fear of detection or enforcement, poor leadership in ethics and integrity and, most importantly, the growth of a culture that either accepts, ignores or is fearful of reporting unethical conduct.

I heard the honourable Attorney-General talk in this debate tonight about a bill of rights, the upholding of the Westminster system and traditions. Do we as an opposition believe in the primacy of parliament? Of course we do. He then went on and accused the LNP of not having respect for the parliament, the people of Queensland and the Westminster system. I say to the Attorney-General that there is a distinct difference between knowingly misleading parliament and upholding the fundamental traditions of the Westminster system.

Those opposite should know that I am one of the strongest supporters in this chamber of the Westminster system and the laws of our motherland. If a politician comes into this place and deliberately misleads the House, then, yes, the politician should be held to account by the laws and responsibilities that those outside this chamber are held to account. When you look at the amendments and the wording, we are talking about a person who during an examination in the Legislative Assembly or by a committee of the Legislative Assembly knowingly gives false answer to a lawful and relevant question put before the parliament or committee.

How on earth can the Labor Party sit in government and not vote for legislation that says if this person 'knowingly gives false answer to a lawful and relevant question'? That is misleading. That is lying and deceptive behaviour. Those on the government side are voting against a piece of legislation that says it is wrong to lie to parliament; it is wrong to mislead committees knowingly. You would not expect any member of parliament, particularly ministers of the Crown, to knowingly mislead the Legislative Assembly or the Crown, and yet tonight this has been knocked back by the government. Before the election in March this year the Premier rushed through legislation—

Mr Shine interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: I want to pick up on an interjection in terms of why this legislation was introduced. The member for Keppel made a comment earlier. He said there is no point in this being introduced. That is precisely right if the government had not taken the clause out of the Criminal Code in the first place. We would not have to be debating this. I would not have to be standing up as the member for Kawana and saying to my electorate, 'I am sorry, folks; we should not lie in public life. I have been brought up on good ethics and morals, but in parliament we can get away with it.' If we expect our constituents and the public not to get away with misleading and deceptive conduct, then we should not get away with such conduct as politicians and parliamentarians in this great House.

Before the election in March this year the Premier rushed through legislation trying to catch out business donations to the LNP. How appropriate that it was the Labor Party that was caught out in not declaring the \$225,000 donation from one of its union contributors. This shows the extent to which Labor will ignore the legislation they draft and subsequently introduce. This is yet another example of how the Premier and Labor will say one thing in parliament and do the opposite during an election campaign. We saw it on 21 March this year. There was no talk of an asset fire sale. To tell me that that money is all needed to pay off the severe debts and was not considered by caucus, the Premier or the Treasurer before March 21 would be misleading—and knowingly misleading the House. We also had the fuel tax. Was that mentioned? Tonight in this chamber, only some two hours ago, we were talking about the poor pensioners of the state having rental increases. None of that was mentioned before the election. That goes to the heart of the accountability and integrity that is lacking in this government.

Recently in this place I talked about the integrity forum held at the University of the Sunshine Coast. I was told by the Attorney-General, 'Jarrod, you are most welcome to come but I really don't want you to say anything. It is for the public.' I am a member of the public. I was elected as the member for Kawana. I should be able to stand up at a university that is in my electorate and represent the people who directly elected me to do that job. To be told by the Attorney of Queensland, a minister of the Crown, in front of the

Channel 9 camera crew, 'Jarrod, you are quite welcome to this open, accountable and transparent forum in your electorate, but I would prefer you not to say anything,' because it was for the three members of the public who were there is a joke!

The organisation of the Integrity and Accountability Forum was in no way, shape or form, as I said, open and accountable to the people of Queensland. The Bligh government cannot claim to be open and accountable when it does not even make the public aware of these public forums to allow Queenslanders the opportunity to have their say. The poor organisation of this event reflects the attitude that the Bligh government has towards openness and accountability in government.

It is about time that this government was accountable to all Queenslanders, regardless of which political party they may have voted for. On 9 December 2005, when the then Premier Beattie took the unprecedented step of recalling parliament, the current Premier and former deputy premier were heavily involved in the process. We have heard it on this side tonight. Who seconded the motion to say that it is okay for ministers of the Crown to knowingly mislead parliament? It was the former deputy premier—the now Premier who leads this state. At that time she labelled the former member for Sandgate 'a decent man', 'a man of integrity'. Yet he is the one who was involved in corruption and cronyism in the Queensland government.

For what it is worth, I personally believe that the word 'integrity' is thrown around far too loosely these days. Someone with integrity is surely someone true to their word. If the government were serious about transparency of government and preservation of the Westminster system traditions, it would at the very least support this bill and subsequently initiate a royal commission into Queensland government corruption and cronyism.