



Speech by

John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard Wednesday, 5 August 2009

MOTION: ESTABLISHMENT OF ROYAL COMMISSION, ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.29 pm): I move—

That this parliament calls on the government to establish a royal commission to investigate the culture of secrecy, political cronyism and allegations of corruption within the government.

For the last month this government has been embroiled in problems with secrecy, nepotism and a culture of corruption that goes right to the heart of the cabinet table. We have seen it with the jailing of former minister Gordon Nuttall, we have seen it with dodgy land deals and we have seen it with ministers who are involved in lobbying. We have had the sight of the Premier having to come in here this afternoon and correct information that she had given in an answer that she gave this morning.

We have heard from a number of senior members of the public in Queensland—the chairman of the CMC, the Integrity Commissioner. Former Premier Wayne Goss said in the paper the other day—

While the accountability mechanisms put in place post Fitzgerald had caught out Gordon Nuttall, the case was a sign of a system where corruption could fester.

He said further—

It is a timely reminder of the risk to the public interest. The result of that recent trial of a minister maybe highlights a system that works but also a culture that is quite worrying.

Over the past couple of weeks we have seen the release of *Dangerous Liaisons*, the CMC report into the police, changes to the South East Queensland Regional Plan, and the lobbying issue of cash for access and success fees. The final person in this quartet of the CMC, the Integrity Commissioner and a former Premier is Tony Fitzgerald, who entered the debate last week with a very famous quote that we have heard a number of times this week in the parliament. I want to share it again, because it is about this government. No matter what the Premier likes to say, it is about this government. Tony Fitzgerald stated—

Access can now be purchased, patronage is dispensed, mates, supporters are appointed, and retired politicians can exploit their political connections to obtain 'success fees' for deals between business and government.

Those are the words of Tony Fitzgerald, stated in Brisbane on 29 July 2009. No matter how much the Premier wants to say it is about some time before the last 20 years, clearly that is what Tony Fitzgerald was talking about last week. They are the concerns that he has expressed.

So that is why I make this challenge to the Premier: establish a royal commission and invite Tony Fitzgerald to chair it. If you have nothing to fear and nothing to hide, invite Tony Fitzgerald—the great royal commissioner of 1989—to chair the commission. If you will not, tell us why you will not.

Let us look at the history. On Wednesday, 12 May 1987, police minister Bill Gunn announced a royal commission into allegations of police corruption in Queensland. In announcing the inquiry, Mr Gunn said—

This is one way of clearing it up for one and for all, because there have been a series of ministers that have had this hanging over their head and it is not going to hang over my head, I can tell you.

Of course, the subsequent Fitzgerald inquiry exposed the corruption and ensured that those responsible for these reprehensible acts were sent to prison. The Fitzgerald inquiry provided the imprimatur for reforms that led to better accountability in government. What we have seen over the past 20 years, but especially in the last 12, has been this government getting around those recommendations of Fitzgerald. Do we think that if Fitzgerald were reporting now he would say that success fees of half a million dollars paid to former Deputy Premier, Terry Mackenroth, would be appropriate? I am sure he would say that it is completely inappropriate.

Mr Lucas: Absolutely.

Mr LANGBROEK: He would say it is inappropriate.

Mr Lucas: Totally inappropriate.

Mr LANGBROEK: In that case, this government has four ministers who are having relationships with developers and lobbyists. They are doing other things like cash for access. I have already made this offer to the Premier. If the Premier wants to stop taking money from the unions, I am happy in a bipartisan way to work through these issues to stop the perceptions of cash for access.

Today, the lessons of the Fitzgerald inquiry have been lost on Labor. They have found ways to circumvent the system. During the debate on the estimates committee reports the honourable member for Chatsworth said that he reckoned members on this side deliberately have their ears closed. I put it that the members on the government side have their eyes closed and their ears closed. They cannot see what they do anymore. Because they are so close to it, they cannot see it. They are saying all that time, 'What we are doing is genuine,' but they are so involved. As I say, by former minister Nuttall going to jail, corruption is well within the government, going all the way to the top of the cabinet table. We have had Merri Rose—another former minister—going to jail as well for attempted bribery. We have also had another former minister charged with a criminal offence.

Today, the lessons of Fitzgerald have been lost on Labor. Not since the bad old days of Queensland state politics has corruption bred so close inside government.

Mr Lucas: What were the bad old days? Who were the bad old days?

Mr LANGBROEK: Queenslanders want to know just how deep corruption goes to the core of this government. The stench of corruption is pungent in Queensland. Last month Gordon Nuttall, a senior Labor minister, was jailed for corruption. I am happy to acknowledge that it was the National Party that established the Fitzgerald inquiry. I say to the Deputy Premier that we would welcome another royal commission now. The National Party established the royal commission. It was a former National Party minister who was happy to establish the commission.

We ask: why will the Premier not heed the words of Fitzgerald, the man who she thinks single-handedly helped to overturn corruption in Queensland—a revisionist statement that ignores that the Fitzgerald inquiry was actually commissioned by the then National Party government. It established a royal commission. Instead, we have a Premier who has appointed as her chief of staff a self-confessed vote rorter who was drilled out of the parliament and brought back as her chief of staff to come up with tactics and strategies and given a \$100,000 pay rise and a Premier who has her husband in the climate change office without any proper process of appointment.

The Premier says that there are no more bad apples on her benches, but we know that the former Premier talked about eyeballing people. They were the sorts of guarantees that we got from that Premier. From where I am standing, I can see a number of members of the Premier's caucus who were adversely named in the Shepherdson inquiry and the Deputy Premier, the member for Lytton, is one of them.

It is time the Bligh government submitted itself to scrutiny and allowed a royal commission to expose Labor for what it really is: corrupt to the core. The Premier presides over a government where dodgy decision making, backdoor deals and secret bribes are par for the course. The culture of corruption in the Labor Party is fostered by the current Premier's and the former Premier's laissez faire attitudes towards the immoral and illegal actions of her ministers.

When ministers lie to parliament—and who can forget that—

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr LANGBROEK: I withdraw, Mr Speaker. When ministers mislead parliament and get off the hook because the government changes the laws—and we all remember that day when the Premier Anna Bligh, the member for South Brisbane, came in here and seconded the motion that exonerated Gordon Nuttall, the then member for Sandgate, and said nice things about him as well, and then came in and changed the Criminal Code, something that Labor governments never want to do but was prepared to do to let parliamentarians lie to the parliament—

Mr SPEAKER: No, again—

Mr LANGBROEK: Mr Speaker, I withdraw—deliberately mislead the parliament. So is it really surprising that ministers might think that they can get away with more? That is the aspect that we are dealing with here tonight. When ambitious apparatchiks who commit crimes by changing their electoral enrolment to stack preselections get rewarded with ministries and highly paid Public Service jobs, is it really surprising that government members will push the boundaries? When ministers are protected from scrutiny by trolleys of documents being wheeled into cabinet, are we really so naive to believe that this government is open and accountable? The culture of permissiveness, the insidious collectivist practice of protecting the bad guys, is what causes corruption.

It is true: this state is run by the mates for the mates. The Labor Party has shown its contempt for this parliament and of this state by letting people get away with wrongdoing. It is time for an investigation, with all the wide-ranging powers that only come with a royal commission. The Premier has talked about referring to the CMC all the issues relating to the South East Queensland Regional Plan—the 33 matters since 2005. How is the CMC going to cope with that? Slowly, slowly, and it will not be revealed here in the parliament as to what is happening. So clearly, we need a royal commission to examine the decisions of those ministers who we know to be corrupt. If they are worth their salt, they will remember that they did not come into this parliament to thumb their noses at decency and integrity. A government that has nothing to hide has nothing to lose by fully investigating these allegations of corruption. I commend the motion to the House.

(Time expired)