



Speech by

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BLIGH LABOR GOVERNMENT

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.30 am): Once again, this morning in the parliament we heard what has become a hallmark of this Bligh Labor government—smear and misrepresentation from ministers about me as Leader of the Opposition attending a public function or about academics who have an opposing view to the government as represented in a press release.

I want to deal with a matter referred to by the Minister for Public Works and ICT. Last night I attended that public function. The Minister for Education, the Attorney-General and the Minister for Public Works and ICT were there, as was the shadow minister for transport and main roads. What did I say there? I pointed out that as an association the Master Builders had 10,000 members and has lost 1,200 members over the last year because of the global financial crises. What have they done? They have had a pay freeze for senior executives and they are not replacing staff who leave. I said that that shows exactly what happens in private enterprise and the sorts of tough decisions made by people in business. When people have to fill out their business activity statements and they see their turnover going down, they have to make some tough decisions. I referred to those sorts of decisions. Clearly, I did not politicise the debate, as I know the honourable minister did in the speech that he made previous to my speech. He spoke about Rudd's Building the Education Revolution.

I make the point—and I continue to make the point—that only this government could have income go up by three per cent in the last year and expenditure go up by seven per cent. I said, as the honourable Treasurer often says, that governments have to make tough decisions, but those on this side of the House will make their commitments to the people of Queensland before we go to an election and we will stick to those commitments after the election. That is not what we see from this government. Over the past five years this government has increased expenditure by 50 per cent and in the year before the last financial year income was up by one per cent and expenditure was up by 10 per cent. It keeps spending more than we earn.

Here is an iron-clad guarantee from this side of the House. The principle that I espouse wherever I go is this: governments cannot keep spending more than they earn. That has happened only under this Labor government. Under coalition governments, we never had deficits. Under the worst Treasurer in the history of this state, the member for Mount Coot-tha, we have a debt that is almost intractable at \$85 million. The debt of this state looks like being half of the total state debt throughout the country. That has happened under the regime of the member for Mount Coot-tha, the Treasurer.

I do not resilie from statements that I make in public forums. In fact, I say to people that I have no fear of anything that I say in a boardroom or a public meeting coming back to me as something I do not actually stand by and hold up as a principle. I say to the Treasurer that at least I will go to an election and tell the people what we are going to do before we have the election, and I will not change it when the writs are returned.

This morning the Treasurer referred to the 19 economists, and I note that another two economists from the University of Melbourne have come forward. He called them 'fringe dwellers'. It is absolute arrogance for the Treasurer, the member for Mount Coot-tha, to refer to those economists, lecturers and

experts in that way. The government was happy to use such experts when it was about the Traveston Dam, the fuel subsidy inquiry or sugarcane smut, but it is not so happy when such people have a different view. All that those people are saying is that we need informed public debate.

The Premier and the Treasurer will say, 'We welcome debate,' but another symptom of this government is that, even though it says it will consult, it does not listen to any of the results of consultation because it has already decided what it is going to do. That is exactly what happens in Queensland. In the June budget there was no consultation. It was a budget in which the privatisation agenda was outlined, after 90 attempts at writing a speech because the government was in such disarray. Now that experts are calling for informed public debate, what do we get? The Treasurer, the member for Mount Coot-tha, calls them 'fringe dwellers'. That is charming!

I refer to the government brochure titled *Facts and Myths on Asset Sales*, which should be called '*No Facts, Only Myths*' and which is completely misleading. The economists state—

The people of Queensland deserve a robust and well-informed public debate over the costs and benefits of privatisation. So far, they have not received it.

That is the point, but the Treasurer looks at those signatories and simply disparages them. The economists include Harry Campbell, Professor of Economics at the University of Queensland; Tim Coelli, Adjunct Professor of Economics at the University of Queensland; and Henry Ergas, Economic Consultant Canberra. I could go on and list those 19 names and the other two. This government is failing to consult.

The government is like the Black Knight from Monty Python's *Holy Grail*. No matter what happens, it just keeps going. The people of Queensland oppose its plans, there goes an arm; the unions are against it, there goes a leg; the opposition is against it, there goes another arm; and, finally, the economic experts give their view and it says, 'No, we are still okay. We are still going ahead with our brochure. We will keep on saying that it's wonderful and it's the best thing for you'. It does not consult genuinely. It keeps spending more than it earns and it does not plan for the future. In terms of planning for the future we have the Premier talking about things such as inner-city rail and metro, or handing out \$3,000 to encourage people to move to the country, even though it costs \$5,000 to move to Cairns.

Nothing more exemplifies how the government is looking for diversions than—bearing in mind that we have record debt, our unemployment rate is the highest in the country and our education standards are poor—the Premier's most pressing issue being the preamble to the Constitution. This week the Premier will bring in a preamble to the Queensland Constitution. In 1999, we had a referendum about whether we needed a federal preamble. Queensland recorded the highest 'no' vote at over 60 per cent. However, the Premier, the member for South Brisbane, would have us believe that she knows better.

Again we have seen the complete misuse of the Law, Justice and Safety Committee to come up with a government agenda. A dissenting report, a very clear statement of reservation, from opposition members who were on that committee clearly stated that there was no great desire for a preamble and that this should be put to a referendum.

Most importantly, in the last few weeks the shadow minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy, the member for Warrego, the shadow minister for local government and I went to the Torres Strait. We were told how the people of the Torres Strait had repeatedly appealed to the Bligh government to improve services that are desperately needed. Despite that, they have been repeatedly ignored. On Hammond Island, they call the Premier and member for South Brisbane 'the Black Widow'. The Torres Strait has the most expensive postcode in the country, but this government will not consider anything like freight subsidies. In Brisbane a loaf of bread costs \$2.40, but on Thursday Island it costs \$5.10. On the outer islands fuel can cost over \$3 a litre. Such is Labor's disinterest in the people of the Torres Strait that it has tried to give away the islands of the Torres Strait. In 1975 under Gough Whitlam it tried to give the islands of the Torres Strait to Papua New Guinea when it was gaining independence. An LNP government stopped it from doing that. In November 1975, an LNP government stopped it giving away the islands of the Torres Strait, the gateway to Queensland, to Papua New Guinea.

It was an LNP government, not Labor, that held a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as citizens of this great nation. It was an LNP government, not Labor, that proudly welcomed the first Aboriginal federal parliamentarian, Neville Bonner. It was an LNP government, not Labor, that had the first and only Aboriginal state member, Eric Deeral. It will be an LNP government that will provide real outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We should reflect on what Eric Deeral said in his maiden speech. He said—

I know and you know there are differences. There are differences in language, culture and the simple differences that are implied by distance and surroundings. These are not the monopoly of Aborigines and islanders.

He continued—

I am not impressed by differences but rather by similarities. Men and women want to raise children. They want to create security for them. They want to work together for this end. They want so many things in common that I oppose and resent theory differences and the friction and intolerance they breed.

The Premier would do well to heed Mr Deeral's advice. The preamble is a red herring. Public submissions, as I said, received by the committee demonstrated minimal support for a preamble. There was an undeniable desire and preference for any proposed preamble to be put in front of Queenslanders by way of a referendum. It is our position that the proposed preamble should be put to the people of Queensland. For this government to take such a cavalier approach illustrates once again that it is a distraction, that it is out of touch and that it is absolutely out of ideas.