



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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### INTEGRITY BILL AND COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY (CORRUPTION, CRONYISM AND UNETHICAL BEHAVIOUR) AMENDMENT BILL

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.32 pm): We really have to wonder about the motivation of the government in bringing these two bills together in cognate form before the parliament. I suspect that it is more about this government trying to clear all the muck away—from its perspective—as it heads into the Christmas period. This government does not want to come back next year with the spectre of a private member's bill hanging over its head which calls comprehensively and absolutely for the establishment of a royal commission into this government's legacy of corruption, cronyism and betrayal in Queensland. So this government has tried to put that particular bill together with its own very weak, benign and impotent attempts to put in place an integrity system in Queensland to cover up for the way that it has failed comprehensively to not only win the trust but also to reward and to keep the trust of the people of Queensland who did put their faith, albeit by a small margin, in the government at the last state election. Indeed, if only I had a dollar for each person who said to me, 'If we only knew then what we know now, then wouldn't there have been a different result.'

This Integrity Bill is more about window-dressing than it is about comprehensively and properly addressing the corruption, the betrayal and the cronyism of this government that sits opposite here today.

In order for us to be able to properly consider this, we need to consider the content of the debate which we are having here in parliament. No-one should for one moment think that this government volunteered the green paper approach out of the goodness of its heart; that this government felt it so necessary of its own motivation that it should go forward and have an enhanced process of integrity and accountability here in Queensland. This was primarily brought about because this government has resorted to what this Labor government and its predecessor have done time after time. That is, rather than fix the fundamentals of the problem, the core rot which has caused the loss of public faith and maladministration in Queensland, they go to the spin cycle in Queensland. Quite clearly, it is about spin over substance. It is about being seen to do something without actually doing anything. That is what we have with this legislation, the Integrity Bill, which is before us today.

On the surface it might make a few little changes here and there and it might offer a few little things here and there, but it really does not do a lot in addressing the fundamental issues of integrity and honesty which are severely lacking in the government in Queensland—the sort of dishonesty and betrayal that courses deep through the veins of the Labor Party, the sort of dishonesty and betrayal that is a part of the Labor Party's DNA which we saw put forward so comprehensively at the last state election. We hear the betrayal that the people of Queensland now feel so much when we talk to them whether they come from the southern part of Queensland, the extreme north of our state, the far west or the far east of Queensland. That has been the fundamental issue. We also have a government which comprehensively has used and abused the CMC process in Queensland in order to launder its own dirty laundry. It is a government that knows a matter, in many cases, is not within the jurisdiction of the CMC in Queensland but, nevertheless, chooses to use the CMC process in order to be able to address its own conscience or to be able to clean

the matter up so it can go on from there, so it can give some sort of a tacit tick that the matter has been properly cleared when it has not been within the jurisdiction of the CMC whatsoever.

We have a government which has now been in power for more than 11 years. At the next state election it will have been in power for in excess of 14 years. No longer is maladministration, incompetence, a complete incapacity of a minister to be able to do their job considered a yardstick for appropriate ministerial behaviour; it now has to be proven criminality. With this government a minister has to be a proven criminal before the Premier will actually act against them and remove them from their particular position. If we go back to times past, including times when the Goss administration was in power in Queensland, if a minister did not operate appropriately or in some way had abused the faith and the trust of Queensland, Wayne Goss had the courage to move against them, but not this Premier or her predecessor. It is more about cover-ups and collusion to protect one's own than it is about giving effect to what the people of Queensland want, which is openness, honesty and accountability in the administration of government in Queensland.

Looking at the Integrity Bill, it is also very interesting that this is allegedly the first tranche of much vaunted reform that is going to come out of the Premier's green paper on integrity and accountability. Is it not very interesting? What a whimper that has been when so many submissions were made. What a whimper when so many things were proffered to address the fundamental dishonesty, cronyism and betrayal of this government and all we have is a bit of window-dressing from this government that is not going to go too far at all.

Let us look at what Tony Fitzgerald implied not long after the state election this year when he gave a speech at a major anticorruption conference in Queensland. He said that not very much had changed in Queensland over the last 20 years and, in actual fact, it had slipped back to where it was. That is paraphrasing what Tony Fitzgerald said. That is what Tony Fitzgerald implied in his speech this year.

Typically, the Premier went out there proffering that she is chaste, that she is whiter than white and that she is purer than pure, at a time when Tony Fitzgerald, somebody in whom we can believe and who knows a little about this matter, had the opportunity to put the administration of the Beattie and Bligh governments under the electron microscope and concluded that in Queensland things were slipping back to where they were. Indeed, if the Bligh administration had been in power in the 1980s and faced the scandals of the then government, there would never have been a Fitzgerald inquiry; there would have been a desktop audit. They would have picked up the carpet and swept it all underneath it. They would have made it all go away. In Queensland we would have had a placebo royal commission. It would have been a desktop audit.

This government does not have the courage and the commitment of the National government of the 1980s, which established the royal commission. Not only did it establish the royal commission; at the request of the royal commissioner, Tony Fitzgerald, it also extended the terms of reference of the commission so that it could look at the issues that needed to be dealt with, which were systemic deficiencies and cultural deficiencies in the administration of the government of the day and its various arms. When this government is faced with the same sort of challenge, what does it do? It says, 'The CMC is the standing royal commission. It will look into things.' However, the CMC does not have the capability to look at the cultural and systemic issues that lead to corruption and maladministration in Queensland, because it does not have broad terms of reference and the government knows that. The CMC responds to specific issues of the day and, frankly, it has no ability to look at issues of endemic and systemic maladministration and corruption of the processes of government, such as jobs for the boys and the sorts of things that are fundamental to the problem that we have in Queensland today.

Let us look at the commitment of this government to commissions of inquiry. When it came to power, we saw the destruction of documentation with regard to the Heiner inquiry, and the closing down of the Cook inquiry into maladministration and issues of alleged criminality in the union movement. That is what they do. They give the impression that they are doing something, but they do absolutely nothing.

Over the past 20 years we have had a government that has legitimised matters that would previously have been considered criminal. In the 1980s, arising out of the events of that time, ministers went to jail for using motor vehicles improperly. What do we see from this government? It has put in place a process that legitimises certain activities that would have been seen as criminal in the 1980s if undertaken by ministers of the day. They have built a process around themselves to legitimise matters that in the 1980s would have been considered criminal and against the public standards. Such matters have been legitimised by statute and regulation in the 1990s and the 2000s. That is what we have seen from this government.

This government talks about the establishment of the CJC and EARC. The CJC and EARC were established as a consequence of recommendations of the Fitzgerald inquiry. Indeed, to the best of my recollection, the enabling legislation for the CJC was put in place by the conservative government of the time, before the Goss government was elected. That shows the commitment of our side of politics to the

establishment of accountability mechanisms in Queensland. I give credit where it is due. The honourable member for Murrumba introduced the first freedom of information legislation in Queensland. That was a very important reform, but it has been incrementally watered down, used and abused by subsequent governments to hide information through exemption clauses rather than to release information. That is what we have seen from this government and its so-called commitment to reform in the state of Queensland.

Let us look at some aspects of the government's bill before parliament today. The bill introduces changes to the role of the Integrity Commissioner in Queensland. The position will be recognised as a statutory officer. A person who has been handpicked by Premier Bligh, Gough Whitlam's former press secretary, will become the Queensland Integrity Commissioner and the position will now come under the ambit of the renamed Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee. Without consultation with the opposition and in conflict with what the Fitzgerald inquiry recommended in relation to the appointment of senior officers, senior public servants and senior statutory officers, the Premier has appointed someone to be a statutory officer. That has happened without consultation with the opposition. She has also renamed the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee and broadened its responsibilities so that it can oversee the operation of that role. I repeat, that has happened without consultation with the opposition.

Over a number of terms in this parliament I have spent time on the MEPPC. I always found that committee to be a very bipartisan committee. It was always aware of the fact that any of its references had to be considered in the context of precedents that it may set, not only in Queensland but also within Westminster jurisdictions across Australia and overseas. We had to be very careful about that. Therefore, I do not think it is appropriate that these sorts of changes are made without proper prerequisite consultation with the opposition.

I would like the Premier in her summary to tell us, given that the Integrity Commissioner or his or her successor will be forced to report to the MEPPC as a consequence of statutory change in this parliament, whether that particular person will be selected in a bipartisan way by an opposition representative and a government representative from the MEPPC, as happens with other independent statutory officers of this parliament. Anything else falls short of absolute openness and accountability. There are examples where, with the selection of other officers, there is consultation and referral to the deputy chairman of certain parliamentary committees. The least the Premier can do is give this House an assurance that that will be the case in future with the selection of the person who will carry out this particular role.

Other issues need to be considered when looking at the establishment of the integrity commission and the changes that the Premier is putting forward. This legislation does not go far enough. All sorts of things have been suggested as part of the green paper on reforming Queensland, but we are yet to really see the things that are going to make a difference to the running of open and honest elections in the state of Queensland. I would have thought that, regardless of all of this window-dressing, the fundamental problem that we have in this state is the absolute genetic incapacity of the Premier to tell the truth to the electors of the state when she or her shoulder parrot, the Treasurer, go to the polls. He sits on her shoulder and says, 'Anna's right. Anna's right.' He says, 'Everything's going okay.' He is the most unpopular member of parliament. He is 'Mr 37 Per Cent'. Fourteen losing candidates actually received a higher primary vote than the Premier's shoulder parrot. They said, 'We're going to keep the fuel subsidy scheme; we're not going to introduce a fuel tax.' That was another broken promise. The first thing they did was introduce a fuel tax. They said, 'We're not going to privatise anything.' What did they do? Straight after the election they said, 'Privatise everything, even if it's bolted down.' The fundamental problem is the level of dishonesty and betrayal of this government. Unless we change that culture, we will not change anything.

Let us look at the supposed changes to electoral donation law in Queensland, which is a part of the green paper which has led to this rather wimpy first tranche approach from the government. We heard a mealy-mouthed response from the Premier when it came to the issue of whether we are going to have a ban or a cap on parallel campaigns being run in Queensland. We are going to have a \$1,000 limit on the amount that an individual or a collective can donate to a political party. That really suits the Labor Party because its coffers, its war chest, its piggy bank is full. So the government has established a natural advantage for itself in the body politic in Queensland in future. It has this huge amount. It has the overflow.

The government will also use taxpayer funds to advertise, as we have seen recently with the \$1.9 million used to advertise across Queensland, its myths and myths and more myths brochure, which has been comprehensively and absolutely dismembered today by 19 financial academics throughout the universities of Queensland, including current and former board members of the RBA. If you were a business in Queensland and you put out documentation like that, you would have the fair trading minister chasing you for unfair, misleading and deceptive advertising. That is what would happen. But when it comes to the government using and abusing taxpayers' money, it can do that. It has a war chest of taxpayers' money from which it can put millions of dollars into deceptive advertising.

Then there is electronic advertising. It has its war chest that has already been built up and it has Labor Holdings. It has the benefit of incumbency of government and then it caps the amount of donations. If the government is going to do that, that is good and well. The government should have a debate on it, but it should also look at expenditure on electoral campaigns in Queensland. The expenditure on election campaigns is a fundamental issue. A cap on expenditure is more fundamentally fair than a cap on donations because it levels the playing field for all players involved, and I am not talking about a cap on expenditure where the incumbent government of the day sets itself a higher proportional amount than for those in opposition or those who may be aspiring to be elected to parliament who might be in a third party or an Independent in Queensland.

The government wants to have its cake and eat it too. It knows that if the union movement in Queensland is stopped from donating to the Labor Party it does not matter because it is absolutely wedded to the ideals of the Labor Party. The union movement will take its millions of dollars and will run parallel campaigns. The government knows full well that any parallel campaign that has been or will ever be run that may support the non-Labor side of politics is benign at best. The union movement in Queensland does not mind nailing its colours to the mast. We can be assured that there will be collusion in this process between the Labor Party and the union movement.

*(Time expired)*