



Speech by

## Dr Mark Robinson

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

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

**Dr ROBINSON** (Cleveland—LNP) (12.40 pm): I rise to contribute to the cognate debate on the bills titled Commissions of Inquiry (Corruption, Cronyism and Unethical Behaviour) Amendment Bill 2009 moved by the Leader of the Opposition and the government's Integrity Bill 2009. I welcome the opportunity to support the opposition's call for a royal commission to restore integrity and accountability to government. Ultimately, without a royal commission, corruption, cronyism and Labor mates' deals in Queensland will likely continue. Labor's new integrity laws will not bring to an end this government's culture of corruption and cronyism. Labor's bill simply sweeps the critical issues under the carpet. In fact, Labor's bill is a desperate attempt to give the impression that the Premier is fighting corruption when by her inaction she is ensuring it is not found.

This bill only deals with a few issues such as the role of the Integrity Commissioner and the banning of Labor's success fees instead of providing a wide-ranging investigation, despite the Premier's promises of widespread reform and the 200-plus submissions to the green paper. Queenslanders want to get to the bottom of the government's corruption, to raise the standards for the conduct of the state's political leaders and to restore decency in this chamber. Only the opposition's bill that calls for an independent royal commission will achieve what the community demands. Only a commission that is free to scrutinise and explore every aspect of government culture will bring secret deeds to light so that they can be purged.

The Westminster system that we have in Queensland is supposed to deliver high levels of integrity, accountability and openness. Sadly, this Labor government has found ways to get around these principles of accountable and integrity. Historian Lord Acton spoke truly when he said, 'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' British Prime Minister William Pitt, in a speech to the UK House of Lords, said, 'Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it.' How true. These timeless words ring true today of this Queensland Labor government.

What we have seen from this almost 20-year-old government is unchecked and unbridled power. The use of power has created an environment in which corruption has flourished. This excessive power has been used to push through legislation quickly, to stifle debate to silence critics and mislead the public. The opposition has limited real opportunities to scrutinise legislation and to contribute to laws. The Queensland Labor government has become its own judge and jury when it comes to the investigation of matters of official corruption and misconduct. How many times have substantive matters been referred to various bodies of inquiry under the Labor government to find that the terms of reference were too narrow or the investigative powers afforded those bodies were too weak? Further, the government has so used the CMC that now the CMC's independence has been brought into question. The guard dogs of integrity in this state have become toothless and powerless to deal with some more weighty issues.

Then there are the MEPPC changes. As someone who sits on the MEPPC, I find it a little disappointing that the changes were simply announced and my input was not sought. The name change of the MEPPC to insert the word 'integrity' does nothing in itself to increase accountability. The government's bill is all about image and appearances.

The government's integrity bill does not prevent ministers from lying to parliament or to one of its committees, nor does it stop the soon to be appointed new Premier, the member for Greenslopes, from deceiving the public at the next election, just as the current and outgoing Premier did at the 2009 ballot. Honesty in this House should never be an optional extra—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Wendt): Order! Member for Cleveland, you have used a word in the last couple of sentences which is forbidden in the House, and I ask you to withdraw that word.

**Dr ROBINSON**: I withdraw. Honesty in this House should never be an optional extra. It has been said that honesty is the best policy. Can I suggest that in parliament, where standards should be the highest in the land, honesty should be the only policy. We have a responsibility to the constituents we represent to always uphold the highest standards of integrity. Unfortunately, under this Labor government we have seen the erosion of integrity in this House. The government's introduction of sanctioned deception is a major step backward in our society. It represents a devolution of values that are foundational to the effective operation of our society.

It comes down to a simple issue of trust. The members of this parliament should be trustworthy. The people of Queensland should be able to trust their state members. May I suggest, being a little cheeky, that regarding the next election Labor use an adaptation of the unions' 'Your Rights at Work' slogan and call it 'Labor: Your right to Lie'.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! Member for Cleveland—

**Ms Grace**: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! I will deal with this and then I will hear your point of order. I have already spoken to you in relation to using that term, and you deliberately went against my wishes.

**Dr ROBINSON**: I withdraw.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! I will ask you to withdraw and I will ask you not to take that matter any further. If you do, there will be further action. I will hear the point of order. Member for Cleveland, take your seat for the moment.

**Ms GRACE**: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am happy with your ruling. It addresses what I was about to raise.

**Dr ROBINSON**: Electoral reform and truth in electoral campaigning are glaringly absent in the government's bill. The Integrity Bill does not tackle the critical issue of the government's conduct during elections. It has done nothing to stop Labor from accepting political donations from people before the courts on official corruption charges. It does not deal with the inappropriate level of influence that unions exert financially and otherwise over the preselection and election processes. Massive union resources of funding and manpower dominate election campaigns. Unions are playing an increased role in elections through large donations to Labor campaigns and by running parallel campaigns.

**Ms Grace** interjected.

**Mr Watt** interjected.

**Dr ROBINSON**: It is interesting, the interjections from the other side of the House. One problem with the large donations from unions to Labor campaigns that is not addressed in the government's bill is that union members are generally not aware of the large scale of such donations—

**Ms Grace** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! The member for Brisbane Central will cease interjecting.

**Dr ROBINSON**:—and have not given consent for their fees to be used for Labor campaigns.

**Mr Watt** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! That goes for the member for Everton as well.

**Dr ROBINSON**: I have had several union members in Cleveland express extreme disappointment that union executives spend large amounts of membership funds on Labor election campaigns without their knowledge or consent. In the previous federal election, it was reported to me in the seat of Bowman that combined unions—particularly the Electrical Trades Union, which practically owns the seat—provided in excess of \$600,000 in direct donations and parallel campaigning to try to oust the federal member, Andrew Laming.

Regarding election donation reform, the government needs to have an approach that includes all forms of union involvement in elections, otherwise this aspect of the government's bill is nothing more than an attempt to rig elections further in its own favour. I challenge the government to adopt an opt-in policy for union donations in which members must choose to donate to election campaigns. If the Premier is serious about electoral reform, there needs to be provision for donations from union members to go to the political party of their choice, not just the Labor Party.

Electoral reform must also consider the issue of union control of the ALP preselection process. For example, in Redland city the Electrical Trades Union has practically bought out and dominates the preselection process. It appears that huge funding investment of the ETU in the seat means that the ETU controls who the candidate is. Through this process, a union literally buys a seat and with it the MP. To me, this is a most inappropriate process. A royal commission is needed to investigate these practices to ascertain if this is a fair and democratic process or whether unions have inappropriately taken over. I again call on the government to support the opposition's bill so that we get to the bottom of Labor corruption and union influence. In conclusion, an independent and wide-ranging royal commission is needed to clean up the state. I commend the opposition's bill to the House.