



Speech by

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MOTION: AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY STATE CONFERENCE

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this House:

Urges the Premier as the incoming national President of the Australian Labor Party to oppose any move to cancel or postpone the annual state conference of the Queensland Labor Party.

It is interesting to note that this morning those opposite thought this was a humorous suggestion for about one minute.

Mr Fraser interjected.

Mr LANGBROEK: Why don't you go back to your seat? Then they spent the next hour trying to get it ruled out of order because they did not want to hear this sort of debate. Very obviously the Premier is now saying that it is stupid and it is a waste of time. We are not wasting the time of the members of this House when we call on the Labor Party to listen to its local members who deserve to have a convention.

We could have moved that this House support the right of Labor Party branch members to have their say and call on the federal Labor executive to ensure the 2010 Queensland annual conference of the Labor Party proceeds. We made an invitation to all members of the caucus, to their electorate officers and to unions so that they could be represented here today to see if they are going to stand up for the Labor Party constituency. Let us have a look at the history. On 7 June last year the Premier addressed the 2009 state conference of the Queensland Labor Party at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre.

I note that when the honourable member for Gladstone suggested a similar motion—that the federal government should pass on interest rate reductions a couple of years ago—that was not objected to by the Labor Party on the grounds that it may offend the standing orders, and I thank you for your ruling this morning, Mr Speaker.

The Premier at the convention told the delegates they should support asset sales. She said, 'Confronted with the challenges of the global recession, we offered the electorate a Labor solution.' The mind boggles! This is a Premier so out of touch that she presents her campaign to cut from the government the jobs of thousands of rail workers, labourers and admin workers as an idea Labor should support. She appeared before an audience who had campaigned on her behalf, who did not know that when they handed out those how to-vote cards and when they stood on those booths they were selling a gross fabrication.

Government members interjected.

Mr LANGBROEK: They do not like to hear it, do they? The Premier who spruiked 'jobs not cuts' was out with her razor telling the party faithful to line up and cop it. So the Premier spent her last conference weekend friendless, begging for support from delegates for her previously unannounced plan to sell QR, Forestry Plantations Queensland, Queensland Motorways and the Port of Brisbane, or else

asking them not to turn up for the vote. Standing at the lectern, she claimed she had a mandate for what she was doing. 'It is a mandate with a message,' she said. 'We have to hear that message.'

The Premier was just 78 days out from the election, but in 78 days her popularity among the Labor faithful had crashed. There among the delegates the Premier had big problems. Like all Queenslanders, they felt—and they were—deceived, cheated and conned. It is no wonder that this Premier is running fast away from any danger that she might have to front another Labor convention any time soon. She is running as fast as her feet will take her from any forum within which Labor members might get the chance to tell the Premier what they think of her mandate.

Premier Bligh is not the only one running from the storm clouds gathering over the convention centre. She is running like a startled rabbit, but two months ago something loomed up behind her and then shot past like a bullet out of a gun. What was it? It was Prime Minister Rudd. It was Kevin Rudd, who takes the blind support of the Labor rank and file for granted. It was Kevin Rudd, whose incompetent, bureaucratic and lately deadly administration is floundering. It is Kevin Rudd under pressure from Tony Abbott and just six months or so from an election. Those opposite laughed this morning but they are not laughing now.

Today in Queensland the Premier is a lightning rod for the complaints of Queenslanders whose jobs are on the state government chopping block along with the government agencies that provide them. The Premier is a lightning rod, but the Prime Minister's ETS has him hooked up to a high-voltage transformer of white-hot anger from across Australia. Neither want to have to explain their odorous policies or face the music from rank-and-file workers who have had enough of being guiled by the Prime Minister and duped by the Premier.

In this country there is a strong democratic tradition. Throughout history our political parties have valued and respected Australia's democratic beliefs. Even today, with union bosses stacking the vote to carry Premier Bligh through the 2009 ALP conference and frogmarching ministers in and out of cabinet, the Premier's party pays lip-service to electoral fair play on its website. This is what it says on the website: 'Party members are the core of the Labor Party. Party members and local branches play a central role in innovative policy development.' I say this to Labor members opposite: they may play a central role, but when it comes to power in the ALP some are more central than others.

Remember the recent findings of the Queensland Council of Unions' poll. Just one in 10 Queenslanders supports privatisation; 59 per cent say that asset sales make them less likely to vote Labor; 66 per cent will not forget; 80 per cent think the government underestimated opposition to asset sales; 70 per cent do not agree with the share float of Queensland Rail; and 74 per cent think Premier Bligh misled the public and kept her plans secret. Premier Bligh is the incoming National President of the Australian Labor Party. The Premier gets her turn at the wheel for 12 months beginning in July, and she takes control right at the time ALP members would expect to attend their 2010 State Conference. Unfortunately for them, the Premier and other Labor figures from Queensland lobbied party bosses, and the weekend before last they agreed to cancel all state conferences in this federal election year. This is an affront not just to angry unionists demanding a special convention to roll Premier Bligh on the asset sales and to Queensland ALP members who want their say unfettered by this unfair gag. It is an affront to all Queenslanders who expect parties to honour their constitutions and to behave in an open and democratic fashion.

The image of the Prime Minister turning tail and running away from the smelly policies of the Labor Party in Queensland is a disgrace to the principles on which his party was founded. The image of the Premier barricaded in her president's office while hardworking Labor campaigners protest outside is another disgrace. It is a double disgrace since the Premier sits here in this chamber pretending to be accountable but turning a deaf ear to her own members and supporters.

On this side of the chamber we are proud that our leaders have shown none of these cowardly tendencies. When Bob Quinn, a former parliamentary leader of the Liberal Party in Queensland, proposed dramatic reforms to internal rules governing preselection and representation within his organisation, he fronted the Liberal Party convention. At the time it was speculated that the proposals would not please the then Prime Minister, John Howard. Did Prime Minister Howard run away and hide? No, he did not. He attended and fronted that meeting, and it was the democratic view of party members that prevailed.

Similarly, shortly after Mr Howard proposed sweeping new gun laws in the wake of the Port Arthur massacre a National Party convention was due in Queensland, and again there was speculation about the likely reaction of party members. Was that National Party convention cancelled? It was not. What is more, the Liberal Prime Minister attended the Nationals conference and fronted rank-and-file members. That is the democratic tradition which we represent and honour in this House and across the state of Queensland. The Premier cannot follow this course and pretend to Queenslanders that she is a serious parliamentary representative. Do not climb up on the public stage and then dive for cover.

In closing, here are some of the Premier's words from the 2009 ALP conference. 'I have made some tough calls recently—calls I never imagined I'd be confronted with—but if there are choices to be made, I will make them.' Premier, it is not tough to hide the government's true intentions from Queenslanders at a time when they expect and are entitled to demand complete honesty. It is not tough to duck for cover or bow to the craven weaknesses of the Prime Minister, even if it is at some small risk to his political hide. Premier, the tough call is to give ALP members their right to have their say on the dangerous meanderings of this Labor government and that of Mr Rudd.

In her speech the Premier singled out some of the true believers: the people who have stood up to be counted and have backed the ALP in the truly tough times—women like Billie Pelling, who worked to establish the Gordonvale women's branch of the ALP in 1963. The Premier should think about her salute to Billie Pelling and remember her obligations to members who expect their say at their annual conference. I say to the Premier: it is her call. She needs to toughen up and stand by those who have stood by her.