



Speech by

Hon. Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard Thursday, 17 May 2012

PARLIAMENT OF QUEENSLAND AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. JW SEENEY (Callide—LNP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning) (8.23 pm): For almost an hour we have been treated to a gobbledegook of misrepresentations, half-truths and irrelevancies. I think what we have seen in the last hour and what we saw in question time this afternoon is a forerunner of what this opposition is going to bring to this parliament. Many people have talked about the fact that the parliament will not function properly because of the reduced number of opposition members. I would suggest, honourable members, that what we have seen this evening and this afternoon would indicate that the only thing that prevents this parliament from functioning properly is the intellectual level of the contributions that are brought to the parliament by the members of the opposition. Any member who comes into this parliament has to do better than just stand up and read a lot of meaningless words that have been written by somebody else—some you-beaut clever Labor student down the street who writes a speech for my old mate the member for Mackay to come in and stumble over. He did not understand the meaning of the words that he was reading, because it was a mishmash of gobbledegook and nonsense.

For the members who were not here for the consideration of the reform bill, let me put on record the facts of the issue. The parliament had a bipartisan committee. The members of the committee made recommendations to the parliament about the implementation of portfolio committees. That was three months—probably four months—before the end of the last term of the government. The government was in power for 14 years. So for 13 years and eight months, no bills went to a committee—none, zero, zilch. No bills went to a committee for 13 years and eight months. Yet these hypocrites come in here and talk as though it is the end of democracy because, all of a sudden, two bills have been declared urgent. How many bills went through this House without committee scrutiny in 13 years and eight months?

Mrs MILLER: I rise to a point of order. As the former deputy chair of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, the Deputy Premier would well know that legislation went to that committee.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! There is no point of order. That is a point of view.

Mr SEENEY: It is a point of view and it is an erroneous point of view. The former scrutiny of legislation committee had the responsibility to scrutinise legislation against fundamental legislative principles. It did not have the role of scrutinising the legislation from a policy position and the member should know that. The self-righteous hypocrisy we have seen here this evening is breathtaking.

Let us go back and look at the bill before the House, which obviously the speechwriters who produced the contributions that have taken up nearly an hour of the time of this House did not read. The policy objectives of the bill are listed at the front of what we call the green, which is the explanatory notes for the bill. They are set out in four dot points—

The policy objectives of the Bill are to:—

- set the formulae to determine the size of the membership of the Parliament's portfolio committees—
and most importantly—

so that they can practically and logistically operate ...

Because of the changes in the nature of this parliament, the committee structure had to be changed so they can practically and logistically operate. Given the changes that have happened in this parliament they could not operate. If members wanted to read a more detailed explanation, it states on page 2—and I will quote it as well—

Following the State Election, the Premier received advice from the Clerk of the Parliament ... that the practicality of the election result dictated that the number of members and the balance of numbers between government and non-government members on each of the Parliament's portfolio committees should change so they could logistically operate.

You do not have to be a rocket scientist to work out that, even with the present numbers, we need 14 non-government members. Under the system that existed before the passage of this legislation, we needed 21 non-government members. Honourable members, there are not 21 non-government members here. There are not 14 members here, let alone 21. The changes that the reform committee put in place also changed the sessional orders of the parliament so that on a Wednesday morning the committees could meet as a representation of the parliament. They were meant to be a sitting of the parliament. When there is not 21 non-government members, the parliament cannot operate in that form. So we have to change the form of the parliament.

The provisions before the House require 14 members. There are not 14 members for the parliament to operate under that provision. It would be irresponsible for any of us not to make the changes that are necessary to ensure that this parliament can operate in the way that it is meant to by that reform committee.

Both the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition quoted extensively from what I and the member for Southern Downs said in regard to that reform bill. It was a bill that had bipartisan support. It was bill that made sweeping reforms to this parliament. It was a bill that ensured that legislation that goes through this parliament is referred to a committee to allow scrutiny by not just members of the parliament but by members of the public. That was following the New Zealand model. But there was always provision in that legislation, and it was often enough spoken about in the debate—which members opposite never quoted—to allow for urgent bills. There were a couple of situations identified very early where bills could legitimately be declared urgent. Of course, the first one of those provisions is process bills—bills that are about process; bills that, for example, change the composition of the parliamentary committees, change the way the parliament operates. They are bills about process. They are not bills that one would seek public scrutiny on. Of course, there had to be a provision for those bills to be declared urgent. The second area where it was identified very early that there needed to be a provision for bills to be declared urgent was at the start of a parliamentary term, because any incoming government has to have a legislative program to populate the *Notice Paper* of this House. Any incoming government has a policy position which it has put to the people of Queensland and which has been accepted by the people of Queensland and which it has not just a right but a responsibility to get on with and to deliver. That is exactly what is being proposed.

The members of the opposition spent a long time talking about the fact that somehow or other it was terrible that these bills were being declared urgent. I make the point that that is not even a provision of the bill. It stretches the boundaries of relevance considerably. This bill has nothing to do with the provision that allows for bills to be declared urgent or the declaration of those two bills as urgent bills. That declaration is not just justified but it was foreseen by the members of the reform committee.

The other part of the gobbledegook that we heard from the Leader of the Opposition and her deputy relates to the structure of the committees. The structure of the committees is a practical response to an election result that was not foreseen by the members of the reform committee. The bipartisan reform committee that we were part of—the member for Southern Downs, the then member for Toowoomba South, the then member for Rockhampton, the former Leader of the House and I think the former member for Yeerongpilly was the other member—could not have foreseen a day when the government would have failed to such an extent that the people of Queensland would have elected just seven members to the opposition. We did not foresee that. If we in the reform committee were guilty of anything it was that we did not foresee the complete self-destruction of a Labor government in Queensland. We did not foresee the horrendous election campaign that that government ran and that resulted in them being rejected by Queenslanders from Cook to Currumbin. In every seat across Brisbane they were rejected because of the election campaign they ran, because of the degree to which they had failed, because of the contempt with which the people of Queensland came to hold them. We did not foresee the extent of that complete implosion. It was not just our side of the committee that did not foresee the extent of that implosion, I think the former member for Rockhampton and the other government members who were part of that committee could never have foreseen it, even though he is still writing the questions for his replacement and sending them down here. We all recognised Rob's handwriting when the member for Rockhampton stood up to ask that question this morning.

Let us have no more of the hypocritical nonsense from the other side. What has been proposed tonight before the parliament is a simple process bill that is about addressing the reality with which this parliament has to deal. It is a simple piece of process legislation that is not just necessary; it is responsible and it should pass through this House without too much debate or opposition at all. The fact that we are here at this time of night debating it is because the members of the opposition are trying to bring within the debate on this legislation a whole range of other things that are not part of the legislation. The issues with the CMC committee are not part of this legislation; they are dealt with by a separate piece of legislation. The questions of whether the bill should be referred to a committee or whether it should be declared urgent are not part of this legislation. They have been dragged into the debate and written into the gobbledegook speeches that we have heard delivered by the members opposite.

Also contained within this legislation, and which the Leader of the Opposition has indicated they would not oppose, are provisions relating to the position and the roles of the Speaker. It is worth putting on record again that what we are doing in this bill tonight is what we promised we would do. Not only did we promise that we would do this, whilst in opposition we moved an amendment in this House to put the Speaker on the CLA as the chair. The government who sat on this side of the House, of which five of these hypocrites were a part, voted against us. I stood over there and I moved the amendment to do what this bill does, to do what the Leader of the Opposition now says that they support. I stood over there and moved the amendment and the Leader of the Opposition stood over here and voted against it. That demonstrates the shallowness of the intellectual contribution that this group of people bring to this parliament. It is not just their numbers that are lacking, it is any credibility in their arguments, honourable members, and that has been shown this morning when they asked a whole heap of questions that should have been questions on notice. They should have been written down, signed and put out here as questions on notice. After all the years in the parliament they did not know the difference between questions on notice, which are supposed to be questions about numbers and data and information that the parliament allows members to ask, and questions without notice. Once again tonight we have seen that complete misunderstanding of the parliament and a complete lack of any credibility.

I would suggest to honourable members that we deal with this quickly and expeditiously. It is a piece of process legislation. It will make the parliament work better. Anyone who has an interest in ensuring that this parliament works better, as every member of that bipartisan reform committee did at the time, would support this piece of legislation. I urge every member in the House to do that tonight.