

Agreement in Principle

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [10.14 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

I am delighted to introduce the Energy Services Corporations Ownership (Parliamentary Powers) Bill 2008 and move that it be agreed to in principle. The Hon. John Kaye also introduced this bill in the upper House. One might say that we are strange bedfellows but when it comes to democracy, openness, transparency, proper debate and ensuring that issues of such import are properly considered, we are happy to side with members of any variety, particularly in opposition to the Labor Party's plan to privatise electricity. The bill is necessary because, prior to the election last year, the Premier stated on a number of occasions that he had no plans to privatise the electricity sector in New South Wales.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: He's a liar.

Mr ANDREW STONER: As the member for Burrinjuck says, that was clearly a misleading statement from the Premier. The Government hid this policy to ensure that it won the election, and as soon as that was out of the way the Premier embarked on this plan to flog off electricity assets.

Mr Robert Coombs: So did the Liberal Party.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The Liberals and Nationals had a clear set of policies in the last election and electricity privatisation was not among them. We had the courage to take it to the people in 1999, but Premier lemma and the Labor Party did not have such courage. As the plan progressed, the Premier's view was that it was not only possible but also desirable to proceed without legislation to enable the sale and/or lease of the State's electricity assets. On a number of occasions the Premier and the Treasurer, Michael Costa, made it clear that it was not their intention to debate the issue in Parliament. Only legislation dealing with some of the conditions of the sale, for example, price regulation, worker entitlements, et cetera, would be introduced.

The Government's clear intention has been not only to mislead the wider public but also to avoid any form of debate in the Legislative Assembly—the people's House. Every resident of New South Wales without exception would agree that was not the proper process. Every resident would like a say. We live in a democracy, which is why we have a parliament in this State. However, the Labor Party, true to form, has sought to subvert our principles of democracy, openness, transparency and debate. Therefore, the Hon. John Kaye and I have been forced to introduce a bill to ensure that the democratic processes take place. Yesterday, as a result of the efforts of the Opposition and the Greens in the other place, we witnessed a day of high dudgeon. Members of the Labor Party were running all over the place like chooks with their heads chopped off. Suddenly, the Premier gave notice that he would introduce a bill to deal with electricity privatisation.

Mr Thomas George: A bill?

Mr ANDREW STONER: He gave notice of legislation, whereas his stated position had been that no legislation would be introduced. This event followed the very courageous stance taken by two left-wing members of the Labor Party in the other place. For a nanosecond I respected the left wing of the Labor Party because at least its members have principles.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: They don't respect you.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I know you do, Carmel. You are a lady of principle, as is the left wing. Two members of the left wing—the Hon. Lynda Voltz and the Hon. Ian West—stood up to the abuse of democracy, and the bullying tactics and the backroom deals done by members of the Right, including the Premier, the Treasurer, John Della Bosca and Eddie Obeid. I congratulate them on their stance.

Ms Virginia Judge: Point of order: The member has breached Standing Order 76, which relates to members' speeches shall be relevant, and Standing Order 73, which relates to imputations of improper motives and personal reflections on members of the House. The Leader of The Nationals has been in the House for long enough to know—

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I will allow the Leader of The Nationals to continue. He is within the leave of the bill.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Nice try by the member for Strathfield! Government members do not like to hear that members of their party have principle and stand up for democratic issues. We call the Hon. Lynda Voltz "240"—"Power to her", we say. She stood up, but what happened? She was treated absolutely appallingly by the usual suspects—the deal makers, the head kickers, the apparatchiks and the bullies in the Labor Party. It was just

disgusting. Yesterday, as a result of that courageous stance, a sudden and extraordinary meeting of the left wing of the Labor Party took place. There was a mini-caucus happening. Yesterday there was revolt about to happen. Labor members covered it up pretty well, but we seasoned observers know what went on, as did the media. And guess what happened during question time? The Premier came in with sham, counterfeit legislation, which he tabled.

The Opposition checked the legislation—it has no status whatsoever. It is not a bill, it is not legislation, and it cannot be debated. We had a hard time obtaining a copy of it because the staff of the Parliament simply did not know what it was. The Parliamentary Counsel could not confirm whether it was legislation. It was not an exposure draft, it was not a bill, so what was it? The best metaphor for it is a cardboard battleship launched to avert a revolt from the left to buy the Premier, Morris lemma, sufficient time to jump on a plane to China, so off he went. The Premier has duded all other Labor members, and that is the shame of it. He not only misled the public and the media, but also misled members of his own party. That is a disgrace.

I thought about whether to proceed with the Opposition's bill to try to keep Morris lemma and the other deal makers in the Labor Party honest, given that there was some sort of intention of a bill. I decided to proceed because the Government's tabled bill has no status. We do not know if the Government's bill will be read a second time when the Parliament resumes, and we do not know, if the bill is introduced, whether it will be presented in its final form. Indeed, we do not know whether there will be a bill at all.

Mr Alan Ashton: Stay tuned!

Mr ANDREW STONER: Stay tuned? Is the member for East Hills in on the deal? The reason the Opposition is proceeding with the bill is that it supports an important principle. It will ensure that the public has some say and that the public interest is protected. Without proper debate we will see bungled, mismanaged deals, as has occurred time after time at the hands of the Government. I have spoken already in this place about the Cross City Tunnel, the Tcard, the Millennium train, all of which were hopeless and mismanaged. If the Government goes ahead without debate and without the proper safeguards on the deal they are hell-bent on doing, we will end up with another dud deal and the public's interest will be sold out, as it was, for example, with the Lane Cove Tunnel—vale Epping Road—and the Cross City Tunnel. The Government will sell out public roads to get the deal through and the public will be duded. The Opposition will persist with debate on the bill before the House to force this Government to at least give lip-service to the principles of democracy in this State.

I have had a cursory glance at whatever that bunch of papers was that the Premier dumped on the table during question time yesterday. I have to say that as a proposal for a bill, it falls very short of the mark. It does not meet the conditions that have been put forward by the Coalition, particularly regarding inclusion of the Auditor-General's involvement in the process right from the start to make sure that the deal stacks up when it comes to public interest. All this week during question time in Parliament the Premier dodged, weaved and danced around because he does not want the Auditor-General in on the deal. He wants only the head kickers, apparatchiks and his union mates in on the deal. That is the deal he wants done, and it is not a deal that is in the interests of the public of New South Wales. That bunch of paper, that counterfeit bill, falls short of the mark. I indicate to the Premier right now: If that is the best he can do, he should not expect to receive support from the Opposition.

I mentioned the day of high dudgeon that occurred yesterday. The scenario has been playing out for a long time. I know that members opposite—a few principled ones—are very uncomfortable about all of this. Members of the Labor Party have not known which way to turn and there has been much flipping and flopping. For example, the member for Bathurst has been acting like a hero in his electorate, but in the Parliament he has been wimping out. Back in his electorate he is saying, "I am not the only one in caucus who feels that way. We've got a major dilemma". I do not think he was referring to Morris.

Ms Virginia Judge: With respect, I would have thought the Leader of The Nationals—

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Is the member taking a point of order?

Ms Virginia Judge: Yes, and I again cite Standing Orders 73 and 76. The member has been in this House long enough to know. He is trying to make out that members of Parliament have improper motives.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I am listening carefully to the member. He is not straying from the leave of the bill at this stage.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Another nice try by the member for Strathfield! She feels very uncomfortable about this issue, which is why she is taking spurious points of order. But we should not stop debate. We should not gag debate on this bill. Members of the public want this legislation aired and open, and they would like to see a stand taken on principle by Government members.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: Well they don't see much from your side.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Carmel, you are becoming bitter, now that you are on the backbench. We want you

back on the frontbench. The member for Blacktown said, "If a Premier of any State has to go to a national executive to get something through in his own State then he becomes a lame duck premier". He went on to say, "I belong to the Labor Party. I don't belong to the Morris lemma-Michael Costa party". Good on him! Good on "Gibbo" for having principles and standing up to be counted, just like two members in the other place who put principle first and their parliamentary careers second and who will go down in history as having the proper motives—as opposed to, as Paul Gibson put it, the Morris lemma-Michael Costa party. The member for The Entrance said recently:

My question is this: I would say does anyone really believe—can you show me someone who will tell you that privatisation of anything in Australia—be it Telstra, be it the banks, be it the NRMA, be it the GIO, be it the State Bank, be it Junee jail—has led to cheaper prices, better services for working families in Australia?

Good on the member for The Entrance who voiced those concerns. He went on to say, "I don't want to roll the Premier, but I will be voting in accordance with the decision that has been made by the conference". Them's fightin' words! The votes at the State Labor Conference were 700 against 100, so we know how Grant McBride will be voting on this bill. The member for East Hills, who has been bouncing around, quite cocky—

Mr Alan Ashton: I would like to know where you got these quotes from.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Well, you guys said them.

Mr Alan Ashton: Not necessarily.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The statement by the member for East Hills was that electricity privatisation was the lemma Government's WorkChoices.

Mr Alan Ashton: Where did you get that from?

Mr ANDREW STONER: From you! It is no wonder the signs are up on the poles again.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: I would like to know where the Leader of The Nationals claims to have obtained those quotes.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Leader of The Nationals has the call.

Mr Alan Ashton: Well, it is a good question.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Nice try from the member for East Hills—you will get your opportunity to question us during question time after 2011. But if he wants to contribute to the debate, of course he can.

Mr Alan Ashton: Time is going to beat you. It is 10.30.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Nearly. The member for Cessnock said:

My constituency does not want this sale or leasing of the power generators. Up to 85 per cent of my community is opposed to it.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: I draw your attention to the time: it is 10.30 a.m.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals can speak for another 30 seconds.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I know members opposite do not want to hear this. They are feeling very sensitive and are squirming in their seats. The answer is easy: Put principle first, support the bill, and support your position in relation to the issue overall.