

PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS COMMISSIONER

876. Mr A.P. O'GORMAN to the Minister Assisting the Minister for Public Sector Management:

I refer to the Leader of the Opposition's in-principle support for the proposal to establish a parliamentary standards commissioner. Will the minister advise the house of the government's response?

Mr E.S. RIPPER replied:

It is very interesting that such a man as the Leader of the Opposition would declare in-principle support for a parliamentary standards commissioner. Western Australia already has the commissioner who was the subject the previous question - the Commissioner for Public Sector Standards - an Ombudsman, an Auditor General, a ministerial code of conduct, a register of pecuniary interests and, over and above that, the most powerful and well-resourced anticorruption body in the entire country. It is worthwhile noting that while the federal government wrestles with the scandal of AWB Ltd, it does not have anything like this state's Corruption and Crime Commission, with its resources and powers to take action against corruption, crime and improper conduct. The fact that the Leader of the Opposition has dared to venture into the arena of standards reminds me of some of the standards that prevailed under the previous government. I sat and listened in opposition for eight years and I watched some of the standards. I saw Doug Shave day after day in this house refusing to take responsibility for a scandal that took away funds from some of the most vulnerable people in our community. I know that the member for Cottesloe thought that action should have been taken against Doug Shave but he was too weak. He could not get Richard Court to take any action against Doug Shave. The member for Cottesloe praised the former member for Geraldton, Bob Bloffwitch - "Give Bob a job", I think the headline said. Mr Bloffwitch, of course, conspicuously failed to declare his shareholding in Kingstream. Then we had Hon Murray Criddle who held shares in Wesfarmers while he was negotiating the privatisation of Westrail freight to that very organisation, and who sought to cover it up by transferring the shares into his wife's name. Consciousness of guilt, I say, with regard to Hon Murray Criddle. Those sins of the coalition in government are matched by their sins in opposition.

The member for Nedlands - how much damage can one do as a shadow minister? It is remarkable that a shadow minister can do any damage. She aborted a trial. That is a first for the performance of any shadow minister in any Parliament in this country. Then the member for Kalgoorlie was found guilty of contempt of Parliament for altering parliamentary records without authorisation, seeking to cover up his own conflicts of interest. The Leader of the Opposition has remained silent because he knows he is guilty of a very serious abuse of parliamentary privilege when he falsely accused a Manjimup man of being a serial sex offender.

Mr P.D. Omodei interjected.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Leader of the Opposition, I think, should sit quietly and reflect on the possible consequences of his abuse of parliamentary privilege. Such a thing as vigilante action is not unknown in our society and arguably he put that man at very serious risk.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Rubbish!

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Now we have the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in a secret car park meeting with a person of interest in a corruption inquiry, cooking up his story and that of the other person, Noel Crichton-Browne, prior to their giving evidence to the CCC. The Leader of the Opposition comes into this chamber and preaches standards to us but takes no action whatsoever. I think the Leader of the Opposition needs to answer a few questions. If he will just stay silent for a moment and let some accountability fall on him, I will run through a few of the questions that the Leader of the Opposition ought to answer. Does the Leader of the Opposition believe it was appropriate for his deputy to discuss the CCC investigation with Mr Crichton-Browne both before and after he was interviewed by the CCC? Well, what does the Leader of the Opposition say? Was it appropriate?

Mr P.D. Omodei: Why don't you sit down -

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Was it appropriate?

Mr C.J. Barnett: You'll blow up in a minute!

Mr E.S. RIPPER: He cannot answer. He will not answer. He will not accept his responsibility as Leader of the Opposition.

It was a little hard to hear but I think the Leader of the Opposition said earlier in question time that he knew immediately when the deputy leader was summoned to the CCC. I have another question: when did the Leader of the Opposition become aware that his deputy was being interviewed by the CCC? What is his answer to that question? Was it immediately?

Mr P.D. Omodei: I will reflect on that and I will get back to you.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: We will wait. It should not be too hard. I am waiting. It is an easy question to answer. When did the Leader of the Opposition know?

Mr P.D. Omodei: If you want to ask me a question, then get up and ask it so that I can answer it fully.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: They avoid their accountability. Let me ask the Leader of the Opposition another question. He is very chirpy when he is asking a question but he is silent and squirms a bit in his seat when he is asked a question. Is the Leader of the Opposition confident that his deputy has not broken the law?

Mr P.D. Omodei: Yes, definitely.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Leader of the Opposition is confident. He has taken advice from the shadow Attorney General, I suppose. I think he had better reflect and get some alternative advice. The Leader of the Opposition is confident that, on the information publicly available, his deputy has not breached section 151 of the Corruption and Crime Commission Act. Is he confident of that?

Mr P.D. Omodei: Get up and ask me a question so that I can give you a full answer.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I am asking the question; the Leader of the Opposition has an opportunity to answer. He can clear the air.

Mr C.J. Barnett: You are like a prancing clown.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: He does not need the member for Cottesloe's help. Let him answer the question. If the member for Cottesloe thinks he has to come to the Leader of the Opposition's aid, he knows his leader is in trouble. That is why the member for Cottesloe is interjecting. Let him answer the question himself. I do not think he needs a mentor on this occasion - or does he? Perhaps he does. Anyway, I have one final question for the Leader of the Opposition.

Several members interjected.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The member for Vasse should be quiet; this is about him. Does the Leader of the Opposition have - he should think carefully about this -

Ms S.E. Walker interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Nedlands!

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Be quiet, member for Nedlands. The member has compromised herself already. She has no credibility any more.

Ms S.E. Walker interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Nedlands!

Mr E.S. RIPPER: She is a trial aborter.

Ms S.E. Walker interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! If the member for Nedlands wishes me to remove her for showing complete contempt for the chair, she will continue in that vein. When I call the member's name, she should at least pause for breath!

Mr E.S. RIPPER: This is an important question and I want the Leader of the Opposition to think carefully about it. Does the Leader of the Opposition have confidence in his deputy?

Mr P.D. Omodei: Of course I've got full confidence in my deputy.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Oh, I think the Leader of the Opposition has just taken a very serious political decision. I think the Leader of the Opposition has just made a very serious political mistake. That shows the standards on the other side. A member can have a secret meeting in a car park with a person of interest in a corruption inquiry and the Leader of the Opposition can declare he has full confidence in the member. I rest my case.