

WESTERN POWER, REPORT ON PRIVATISATION

36. Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO to the Leader of the House:

I refer to revelations that this House was denied information about the Leader of the Opposition's secret report on the privatisation of Western Power and ask whether the minister has established why this serious breach of accountability occurred?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

I thank the member for this question. We are yet to receive a reply from the Leader of the Opposition, so he will have another opportunity. It became clear yesterday that only one party stands between the total or partial privatisation of Western Power, and that is the Australian Labor Party. The Leader of the Opposition is ducking and weaving because he does not want to come out and state his agenda. I recall what he said earlier in the week when he was confronted with claims that he had been involved in seeking to privatise Western Power when he was minister. He said that the Macquarie Corporate Finance report had nothing to do with him and he never had any intention of wholly or partially privatising Western Power. It is unbelievable that a major trading enterprise such as Western Power would embark on engaging consultants or obtaining a major report on privatisation if the minister had not been in the loop. This is a member who claims he was a hands-on minister! We are being asked to believe that the privatisation agenda in Western Power was not something that the then minister, the now Leader of the Opposition, knew anything about. That is what he claimed previously. The "Path to Privatisation" report of April 1998 stated -

It is understood that both the Minister and Western Power have considered a variety of alternative privatisation options. At present, the preferred model is to retain Western Power as a vertically integrated utility.

That is taken from the very report that the minister at the time said he was not driving. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition confessed that he had no knowledge of the report. I asked him to explain how it was that when the Government tabled reports every six months, that report from Western Power was not included. Western Power was responsible for initiating the report, but the responsible minister is required to ensure that it is included in the reports tabled in this House. It was part of an undertaking by the previous Government - which we have continued - that reports on expenditure on consultants would be tabled every six months. That is the responsibility of respective ministers. The Leader of the Opposition, as the then minister responsible for Western Power, did not ensure that the report was tabled. Can the Leader of the Opposition now explain how that happened? Does he not want to shed any light on that?

Mr C.J. Barnett: Read our policy on Western Power. Our policy at the 2001 election was that we will not privatise Western Power. That is the Liberal Party policy.

Dr G.I. Gallop: That is what they said about AlintaGas.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: My question is -

Mr M.F. Board: We will not privatise Western Power.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That report was not listed in the six-monthly list of reports. Can the Leader of the Opposition give any explanation for that?

Mr C.J. Barnett: You have access to all my ministerial records - I do not. I assume you have searched them; you have every other time. Go and search the records. I do not have the records.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The six-monthly report on all consultants reports to government are public documents. We have a copy of the report from Western Power that we have been discussing. That was not listed in the six-monthly report the Government tabled. There has been no explanation for why it was not listed in that report.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Go and check all the records, as you are prone to do. You go through my ministerial records regularly. Do it again.

Dr G.I. Gallop: We do not do that.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Yes you do. You do so regularly. Go and look through them. The process was - I imagine it is the same under the current Government - that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet would request the ministers to provide that information. As minister, I would have sought that information from all the agencies within my jurisdiction, including Western Power. That information would have been forwarded to me and then directly forwarded to the Premier's office. That is the process my ministerial office followed, without any variation.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Is the Leader of the Opposition saying that the problem potentially arose in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, which failed in its role, but that he fulfilled his responsibility of forwarding that report to the department?

Mr C.J. Barnett: No.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Richard Court is at fault.

Mr C.J. Barnett: No. The process, which I think you will find happens in your Government, is that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet requests the information, quite properly. Ministers then require that the list of reports and costs be provided to them, and they are then forwarded to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. That was done diligently within my office.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Did the Leader of the Opposition sign off on the forwarding of that information, as I do for my responsibilities?

Mr C.J. Barnett: Yes; on the list provided by the agencies. I would have done that. I am sure that if you pilfer through my records, that is what you will find.

Dr G.I. Gallop: We never do that.

Mr C.J. Barnett: You do it all the time.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: My other question is: did the Leader of the Opposition meet the Macquarie consultants who prepared this report?

Mr C.J. Barnett: I do not know every appointment I had. I met with Macquarie representatives a number of times. For example, Macquarie acted on the AlintaGas and the Dampier-Bunbury pipeline privatisation.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition would like to check his records.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I do not have my records. I did not walk out with every record I had when I was a minister. You go and check them; you do it all the time. I met with Macquarie on a number of occasions about a number of issues.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for providing part of the answer. We will seek to learn whether he is correct in blaming the previous Premier, Richard Court, for those documents not being mentioned in the tabled consultants report.