

MINISTER FOR PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE, CONDUCT

480. Mrs EDWARDES to the Premier:

I refer the Premier to comments made today by Associate Professor Allan Peachment about the conduct of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. He said that it is irrelevant how the minister received the document. It is spelt out very clearly that a minister does not have access to the records of the previous Administration, particularly if that Administration was of another party. Even with the minister's own party she would have limited access.

- (1) What action does the Premier intend to take about his minister's serious breach of longstanding cabinet convention, which is essential to ensure the efficiency, effectiveness and integrity of Cabinet?
- (2) As the chairman of cabinet meetings, does the Premier condone the minister's action?

Dr GALLOP replied:

- (1)-(2) We must judge this case according to the rules that exist in the Western Australian Government. Yesterday, I gave a full statement to the House in response to a question about the circumstances in this instance. I urge the member to consult the cabinet handbook in Western Australia, which states that any documents that are, in the view of the minister or the chief executive officer, not sensitive, may be placed on open departmental files. Ultimately, each minister retains responsibility for the extent to which cabinet documents are circulated within his or her portfolios. Obviously, the previous Government made a decision that that cabinet decision sheet was not sensitive, and was placed on the file. Indeed, when the minister wanted to pursue that matter, that file was sent to her with that decision in it, so that she could carry out her duties as a minister. I am conscious of the ministerial code and the cabinet code in these matters.

Mr Board: Who made the decision to put it on the file?

Dr GALLOP: That decision was made by the member's Government.

Mr Board: Who made it?

Dr GALLOP: I have no idea. It was obviously made by whoever was the minister at the time. Is the Liberal Party having another go at the National Party? Is this another attempt to try to win the seat of Merredin?

I will deal with the standards of the Opposition in this matter. Perhaps the member who asked this question and quoted Professor Peachment could go to the *Hansard* of the Western Australian Parliament on 3 August 1993, because there was an interesting debate in the Parliament on that date. What did the member for Cottesloe do during his early days as Minister for Energy? It is fascinating. Given the criteria the member for Kingsley has just set in relation to these matters, I will line up that criteria with what happened in the Parliament of Western Australia on 3 August 1993. When talking about the Collie power station, the member for Cottesloe said in Parliament -

How close did the heroes opposite get to reaching a decision on this matter? In a Cabinet decision of 12 November 1992 they "noted that SECWA intended to proceed with further negotiations subject to modification of the basis upon which they should be conducted and the Cabinet agreed that that course should be pursued".

When the member for Cottesloe took on the energy portfolio, he went into the documents of the previous Government and used them in this Parliament for political effect.

Mr Board: It doesn't say that.

Dr GALLOP: That is exactly what happened. There is more.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Dr GALLOP: Let us continue.

The SPEAKER: The level of noise is such that I cannot hear what the Premier is trying to say.

Mr Day interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Darling Range to order for the first time.

Dr GALLOP: That is quoted from a cabinet decision of 12 November 1992. The Leader of the Opposition can clarify the matter when he returns next week. The other interesting issue is that the Opposition is saying this matter is cause for the minister's sacking and that a major inquiry into these issues is needed. Is it not

interesting? I am sure members of the National Party would love this one. A fascinating debate occurred in Western Australia in 1998 about the uniform tariff. As a result of that debate, the full cabinet submission relating to the uniform tariff policy found its way into the hands of the then Opposition. I, of course, raised the matter within Parliament because that Government had vindictively and viciously pursued public servants it thought had been engaged in leaking documents. The current Leader of the Opposition, who was Minister for Energy at that time, said -

Some cabinet documentation relating to regional pricing found its way into the media. I was extremely unhappy about that. I raised the matter at Cabinet, and I am satisfied that corrective measures were taken within the department concerned.

On 14 October 1998 he also said -

I have raised the matter. There have not been any leaks of information relating to my portfolio since then, and I have left the matter at that.

What concern opposition members have for these sorts of issues! When the Liberal Party was in government, it did nothing when these issues got a little bit close to its people, but when it accused a public servant, it sent down the full force of the law upon that person. In the end, there was no proof and that person was not found guilty of anything, yet, he had been pursued. The Opposition is guilty of hypocrisy.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Dr GALLOP: I will talk about today. That document was put on the file by the previous Government's ministers and was accessed by our minister in the course of her normal duties. We will have fun getting the Leader of the Opposition to tell the truth to this Parliament about the comment he made in 1993.