

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, UNION OFFICIAL AT BUDGET MEETINGS

684. Mrs EDWARDES to the Minister for Education:

Can the minister confirm that under this Government, a union official will be present at all Department of Education budget meetings, both internal and interagency?

Mr CARPENTER replied:

I thank the member for this very interesting question. Certainly no such directive has come from me. However, it fits in nicely with the pattern of questions that apparently emanates from the office of the member for Kingsley and the member's fixation, or the fixation of the person who writes these questions, with the union membership of people who are working in the department and their union history. I briefly told the House once before that the member for Kingsley is apparently circulating some document that alleges that a former union -

Mrs Edwardes: I did not have to circulate it; whoever wrote it circulated it.

Mr CARPENTER: I thought the member lodged a formal complaint about me.

Mrs Edwardes: To the Commissioner for Public Sector Standards; absolutely.

Mr CARPENTER: She lodged a formal complaint based on the allegation that former union official Mr Kevin O'Keefe spent nights at my house. As I said to the Chamber at the time, he must be doing it when I am away. I asked my wife about it and she swore to God that he had not been there. The man has never been to my house.

Some of the member's questions have asserted that there was something wrong with or strange about former union official Mr Harken being made the acting deputy director or whatever he was of the Department of Education. Last week I received a written question from the member asking whether I met with Mr Ed Harken on Sunday, 2 December. I suppose she could ask a question like that for every day of the year, and, if by chance I happened to have met Mr Harken on one of those days, she could say that she had told everyone that we had been meeting each other. I met him this morning at Balga. I shook his hand and said, "How are you, mate?" We had a bit of a chat, but there were other people listening.

The member for Stirling came to me and described an outstanding educator in his electorate, Kevin O'Keefe. Is this true? He was then the principal of Mt Barker Senior High School. He was subsequently put into an acting position -

Mr House: It was not Ed Harken.

Mr CARPENTER: No, it was Kevin O'Keefe. He has subsequently become the victim of what I describe as a smear campaign. This smear campaign, emanating from the office of the member for Kingsley, could potentially destroy the career of a person of lesser stature and personality than Mr O'Keefe.

The member for Kingsley asserted that former union official Mr Harken was a member of the Labor Party. According to my sources, he never has been a member of the Labor Party. I do not understand. Perhaps the member needs some counselling. She needs some assistance to deal with being in Opposition. I think I know who is supplying the member with the information for these questions, and it shows the very sad decline of the person who I think is supplying that information.

I said to the Department of Education, the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations and the State School Teachers Union that we should try to have a better relationship. What a terrible suggestion that was! A better relationship between the minister's office, the Department of Education and the union would ensure that we did not do what was done previously. Under all shades of Government, every two or three years they bunker down in a room, bang their heads together and fight out a battle over wages and conditions.

I suggested that we have ongoing discussions about the way the enterprise bargain agreement can be developed, about changes in career structure and changes in remuneration. I thought that was a constructive suggestion. I have never suggested anything else as far as I am aware. As I said, there may be things happening when I am asleep, when I am absent or absent-minded that I am not able to recall -

Dr Gallop: Apparently money transfers hands at soccer grounds and people do not know why it happens.

Mrs Edwardes: That is a bit below the belt; you know that has been sorted out.

Mr CARPENTER: If the member for Kingsley wants to venture down that track -

Mr Barnett interjected.

Mr CARPENTER: The Leader of the Opposition's interjections when I am on my feet remind me of that poor unfortunate fellow Zab Judah who fought Kostya Tszyu. He was knocked to the canvas, but jumped up and said

there was nothing wrong with him and promptly fell down with arms flailing. The Leader of the Opposition is a beaten, broken man and he would be wise to sit and absorb a bit of the information that is coming his way rather than interject. As far as I am aware there has been no such directive or instruction. However, I freely admit that I have encouraged -

Several members interjected.

Mr CARPENTER: I could have said he reminded me of Johnny Famechon, who never landed a punch and got right to the top.

As far as I am aware, there is no such instruction.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr CARPENTER: Why would I? What a stupid thing to say. I have encouraged them to have a better relationship. That is as far as it goes. I do not know who attends meetings. I am sure that when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Education he did not demand to know who was attending all the budget-related meetings. It does not happen that way. I suggest that the opposition take a good hard look at the sorts of questions it is putting up. Opposition members should remember all the accusations made about the member for Kingsley and her husband, because that is exactly what the opposition is doing to two professional people in the Department of Education.