

GOVERNMENT'S ELECTRICITY REFORMS, PRIVATISATION OF GOVERNMENT-OWNED POWER STATIONS

**345. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Energy:**

I refer to the Leader of the Opposition's plans to privatise Collie power station. Will the Government's electricity reforms bring about privatisation of government-owned power stations?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members! Cross-chamber interjections are costing us more time today than question time. If members do interject, they should be directed at the member speaking, not across the Chamber at other members.

**Mr E.S. RIPPER replied:**

Cabinet has endorsed a prudent electricity reform program for Western Australia. This program aims to provide lower electricity prices, more investment and a stronger economy. It is not a radical or a revolutionary plan; it is an evolutionary plan that will place a premium on job security and job growth.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I challenge you to a debate on electricity reform.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Leader of the Opposition has challenged me to a debate on electricity reform. I am happy to have a debate if he wants to move a motion to debate a matter of public interest. He should bring it on and we will debate it during the one and a half hours of private members' time that is available tomorrow. I am confident that the Government can defend its electricity reform program, not least because Western Power and its successor organisations will remain in public ownership. The Australian Labor Party is the only party that has guaranteed public ownership of Western Power. The Leader of the Opposition certainly has not guaranteed public ownership. He told *Business News* that if the Liberal Party were in power, one of Western Power's generators would have been privatised by now. The workers in the power industry heard that loudly and clearly. They know the Thatcherite ideology of the Leader of the Opposition and of his privatisation plans. He is a man under some pressure. He told ABC radio this morning that Muja Power Station would be closed as a result of electricity reforms. That is absolutely wrong. That statement illustrates the desperation of the Leader of the Opposition. Fortunately, in our community there are some credible people on electricity reform.

Ms S.E. Walker: And on our side of the House.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: And on the member for Nedlands' side of the House. I will come to that in a minute. I thank her for that interjection; it was very helpful. AlintaGas issued a statement saying that the Government's commitment to reform is an important factor in providing AlintaGas with the confidence to undertake a project with Alcoa Australia Ltd to jointly develop up to 10 energy-efficient cogeneration power plants at Alcoa's alumina refineries in Western Australia. That is very significant. We have already had a response to the Government's announcement yesterday. People are already saying that is the green light for private sector investment in the electricity supply industry. The Chamber of Minerals and Energy said that the plan is a practical, low risk approach to reform with wide-ranging benefits. It has also been welcomed by the Sustainable Energy Industry Association and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

I am happy to take advice on this occasion from the member for Nedlands, who indicated that I should quote someone from the other side of the House. That is exactly what I will do. A very experienced observer said -

The most important point we must recognise is that the cost of delaying energy reform will be even greater unless we recognise that a do-nothing, no-reform scenario will retain the current non-competitive structure in the WA economy.

That person went on to say -

Regrettably, it is all about Western Power wanting to maintain the empire. In maintaining that empire, we as consumers are ultimately the net losers because Western Power continually dissuades new operators from coming into the field.

Are members opposite getting it yet? Do they know about whom I am talking? He went on to say -

I am prepared to support the disaggregation of Western Power. . . . If we fail to do it, we fail not only ourselves but also the people of Western Australia, because currently we have an inefficient electricity system, but the good news is that there is a report that recommends how that inefficiency may be remedied.

This very experienced observer also said -

. . . I believe that we as a Parliament need to support the position of the Minister for Energy as it is generally stated through the Electricity Reform Task Force's most recent publication.

Who does the member for Nedlands think said that?

Ms S.E. Walker interjected.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Can she identify the person?

Ms S.E. Walker interjected.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: She is not willing to identify the person. It is the elder statesman of the Liberal Opposition, Hon George Cash MLC. Those are very wise comments from Hon George Cash. They demonstrate just how isolated the Leader of the Opposition is in his implacable opposition to reform of our electricity system in this State.