

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Leader of the House) [9.55 pm]: I move -

That the House do now adjourn.

Learning and Attentional Disorders Society of Western Australia - Adjournment Debate

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [9.55 pm]: The House should not adjourn before it acknowledges the situation currently confronting the Learning and Attentional Disorders Society of Western Australia Inc, generally referred to by the acronym LADS. I have been corresponding and meeting with Mr Ed Hartley, the president of the management committee of LADS, in recent months, and I spoke with him as recently as noon today. The Learning and Attentional Disorders Society is an incorporated body run by a management committee of elected volunteers, which consists of professionals and parents and is supported by a 20-member professional advisory board comprising specialists from education, health and allied health services. It also retains one full-time paid position of office coordinator. The coordination role allows this organisation to run as it has for the past eight or nine years, providing a variety of services to people whose lives or family circumstances are touched by learning and attentional disorders. These services include counselling, retreats for children, morning teas for mothers, seminars and sessions conducted in schools, and of course the coordination of the volunteer professional help provided by the professional advisers to whom I have already alluded.

The services provided by LADS over almost a decade have been much appreciated by the group's clients, and at this time LADS boasts some 600 members. However, LADS is an organisation that goes beyond the size and the complexity of something that can be run by a group of community-minded and like-minded volunteers. The coordination and provision of professional services requires a particular budget - which cannot be provided indefinitely from normal fundraising methods. I am sure that all members know of many groups in our community that perform very good work based largely upon the commitment of volunteers. Without those groups our society would be very much the poorer. I believe that LADS fits into this category. Sadly, LADS is at a crossroads at this time. Its viability is very much in the hands of the State Government. It is in a position in which it has the membership, the available services that I have briefly outlined and money in the bank, but it will not have the budget available to it to continue providing services beyond perhaps the end of next six months or the end of this calendar year unless a circuit-breaker is provided to enable it to continue. I will come to that in a moment.

Members should be concerned because I understand that the society provides a unique form of service that may not otherwise be easily available to people who require it. The situation confronting the society's committee at this time is that it must make a decision about what to report to the annual general meeting of the society, which is due to be held on 17 April. One of the hard options that is available to the committee by way of recommendation to that AGM is that LADS be wound up. I do not think that anybody wants to see that happen, but that may have to be the course that is followed. Between now and the forming of recommendations for the AGM, there is a window of opportunity for the Government to take a role if it has a mind to do so and it thinks it is worthwhile to continue to have these services available in this way to the people of Western Australia who require them.

Basically, the society requires some sort of core contract work to enable it to underpin its operations. I believe that it is equipped to do that. Recently the organisation put in an application for pre-qualification as a supplier to the mental health division of the Department of Health. One of the difficulties that LADS confronts is in finding a particular single portfolio area into which it fits. The mental health division is offering tenders for these sort of services, but of course LADS supplies services in areas of disability support and education particularly, but not uniquely, to traditional mental health areas. LADS did not achieve pre-qualification. I have no criticism to make of the Department of Health officers concerned with making the assessments for tender qualifications, because I am sure from my review of the documents available to me that they followed the necessary procedures and conducted the evaluation in an exemplary manner, including follow-up advice to the society. I do not think a lifeline is available to the society through normal departmental means. It is up to the Government, if it wishes to do so - I am appealing through the Leader of the House to the Government to look at LADS - to make available a government adviser to sit down with the management committee.

Hon Ken Travers: Has LADS asked for that?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: There has been a lot of correspondence, but I am now asking the Government to examine what LADS is capable of providing and to make that assessment. Is there room for the Government, if it sees fit, to secure the continuation of this unique level of service provision and ensure the society's viability for at least the short term so that it has the opportunity over the next 12 months or so to take the next step and

achieve the pre-qualification status that it needs to compete with other mainstream suppliers of services to the mental health division?

I therefore ask the Government, through you, Mr President, to consider an examination of this affair in the next week or so and to determine what it thinks should be done with this resource, which is currently available but might not be available in the very near future. I ask the Government to make an assessment of where it stands and whether it wants this sort of service delivery to continue. I thank the House for allowing me to make this plea on behalf of LADS. I am sure that the Government will take this on board.

Withdrawal of Motion No 10 - Adjournment Debate

HON DEE MARGETTS (Agricultural) [10.08 pm]: I want to outline some of the background to the stance that the Greens (WA) took earlier today on the motion relating to Standing Order No 73 and to explain why the Greens denied leave for the House to deal with the issue. We were dealing with something that had been on the Notice Paper for nine months. Late last night, at around 10.45, one of our number came across a ministry staffer who handed that person a sheet of paper and indicated what would happen when the issue was dealt with in the House. That was the extent of the consultation involved. It was not the Liberal Party or the Government talking to us but a chance meeting in the corridor at 10.45 last night that indicated that what we considered to be an inadequate proposal would be watered down.

From the Greens (WA) points of view, the House had a unique opportunity to get some commonsense into debating times and to get rid of the ridiculous situation in which a member has, as a result of membership of a particular party or being given the job of leading the debate by a political party, unlimited speaking time. I do not believe that is acceptable, given that all of us are here to represent our electorates. It is an anachronism that any member of the Government or Opposition can single him or herself out - this is what happened last night - for special privileges in the presentation of debates. Can anyone say that they do not have sufficient opportunities to present their argument in debate? It defies logic, given the number of people on either side of the House. If a party has so much to say that it needs more than one speaker, and there are more people in that party, another person can follow that up. We should all aim to speak as effectively as possible. Nobody needs to speak for three, four, five, six and seven hours at a time. We should be moving past that. Any time in the next month, two months or few years that this Government tries to tell the Greens (WA) that it has a problem with the timing of debates and that there is not enough time to debate its legislative program or it does not know how much time a particular debate will take, we will remind it of its collusion with the Opposition to maintain the privileges of unlimited speaking times, and its unwillingness to deal with us as human beings and talk through the issues. This matter was handled in an atrocious way, and the Government has lost an opportunity.

On several occasions the Government's response to the Greens has been that the Opposition said it would waste time and would debate it out. The Opposition has the next four motions on the Notice Paper, so that is somewhat unlikely. Even if the Opposition debated from now until forever, we could have had a sensible debating schedule; we could have had some predictability in the debating time of this and every other motion and piece of legislation. The Government has blown this; it is responsible for what happened late last night. We had nine months lead-in time, but there was no consultation. It is not good enough.

Sinking of HMAS Sydney - Adjournment Debate

HON J.A. SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [10.11 pm]: Just over a week ago I gave an almost erudite speech on the sinking of the HMAS *Sydney*. At that time I indicated that I would seek leave in future to table the documents that I had been speaking from. The media has taken those documents as having already been tabled. It is important to table those documents because I assume the Navy and the Air Force may want to look at them, because they claim that records have been falsified to present an incorrect picture of what happened around the sinking of the *Sydney*. On that occasion I was not aware that one could seek leave to table a document in the adjournment debate, but I have since been told that I can.

Hon Ken Travers: Did you give notice of this?

Hon J.A. SCOTT: Yes, I did. I said in that speech that I would seek leave. That was 13 days ago, so I hope that is sufficient notice. I seek leave to table the documents I quoted from, which are a signed statement from Flight Lieutenant Cooper and a statutory declaration from John Doohan.

Leave granted. [See paper No 1284.]

Local Government - Adjournment Debate

HON PETER FOSS (East Metropolitan) [10.14 pm]: I rise in the adjournment debate because I was disappointed at the total failure by the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development to answer a question that I asked today. The question related to a remark made by the Premier in which he said that if local government councils contributed to the Country Alliance fund, their grants would be looked at on the basis that

they did not need any money. I notice that after the Premier said this, he has done a bit of back-peddalling to indicate that he was not threatening them and what he said should not be taken as a threat. I do not know how other people view the English language, but I saw that as clearly a threat or at least a promise that when local government came to see the Government it would be told that if it contributed funds to the Country Alliance it would not get funds from the Government.

That concerned me because I understood when Dr Geoff Gallop became Premier that he was making a break with old Labor - the Labor Party that brought us Brian Burke, Peter Dowding and Carmen Lawrence - whereby Government was used as a means to beat up people in the community, to provide favour to one particular section - to friends - and to punish people who were seen as the enemy. I believed Dr Gallop intended to make that break. I found the threat that was made by Dr Gallop to be a clear example of an intention by the Government to ignore the ministerial oath. I had hoped that ministers in this Government understood that they had to make decisions without fear or favour. Ministers make decisions based on merit. If a shire says it needs a grant, the minister decides that on the merits. Ministers do not prejudge matters - that is where the word "prejudice" comes from - they have to make decisions on merit. Ministers do not announce that people who make a decision which they do not like will get a kick up the backside. Therefore, as the minister in charge of grants, I was hoping to get from the Minister for Local Government some sort of assurance that the grant system - much of which is handing out commonwealth money - would not be perverted by the Government by a change to the system or that it would give directions to the people who made the grants to prevent that money being distributed in the way it is normally distributed without fear or favour, without reckoning whether a person is a political ally or enemy or is looking after his interests, which happen to clash with the Government's interests.

I was disappointed that the minister would not deal with that part of the question. He gave his views on why the Opposition was not paying for it and how I could deal with the case. It is flattering for him to say I could handle the case, and I am sure he must have an appropriate appreciation of my legal ability. However, that was not the question; the question was about the propriety of what the Premier had said and whether the minister would go along with it. It was particularly appropriate that, minutes before, the minister said he did not think it was appropriate that he hear complaints against the third tier of government as that should be done by some independent person. Minutes before we heard gushing sentimentality about how he felt for local government and he did not think he should be sitting in judgment on them. However, the Premier said local government would get the cane. The judge and jury have already sat in the other House and decided that any local government that contributes will get a smack. The Government is saying, "Understand right now, this is an order: you do it and you will get a smack!" Fascinatingly, during today's debate the Premier seemed to resile somewhat from that attitude. He tried to say that he was not threatening local government. It is entirely improper, and I am sure that the Anti-Corruption Commission would be extremely interested in it.

The Attorney General then said that if any council gives a donation, there will be an inquiry into that council and heads will roll. He said that he was not threatening them, but that is what will happen. If any council makes a donation, there will be an inquiry and heads will roll! I am sure that union thugs go along to a workplace and say, "I'm not threatening you. I just want you to know how you will be dealt with if you do this particular thing which we do not like. I'll tell you how Joe got his!" No matter how members opposite might justify it to themselves, that is thuggery. It is thuggery because it is a threat. It is improper conduct by a minister.

It is particularly offensive when one considers the two ministers who have issued these threats. One is the Premier, who issued this brilliant ministerial code of ethics. I like to get this document out and compare its high-flown sentiments with what actually happens. It is nothing more than words. The words that count are the words, "Step out of line, mate, and you'll cop it." The Premier has said that local government will not get any money in the way of government grants. The Attorney General has said the Government will inquire into local government and heads will roll. As an ordinary human being I would see that as a threat.

If a bokie came along and said that to me, I would think of organised crime. We cannot have bikies making threats to people saying there will be some detriment. We would have a special Act if bikies did it. Now that I come to think about it, I suspect that the exceptional powers legislation would apply to Cabinet if cabinet members made such threats because there would be two or more people making these threats, and that is one of the crimes that is not allowed. It will be interesting to see whether the police will investigate using the exceptional powers legislation for what Cabinet has been up to. It is fortuitous that both the Premier and the Attorney General put into that legislation that there will be no privilege. They must have foreseen that we might want to inquire into Cabinet at some stage.

The fact is that the chief law officer and the Premier of this State have both threatened local government councils. Whether members think the councils should donate the money is a personal view. I do not have a problem with the Premier or the Attorney General thinking it is a bad idea. I am sure the Attorney General

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thinks it is a bad idea. He does not want anybody to argue this in court. Whatever ministers might think, they express their view and they do not threaten. That is thuggery. That is the thuggery we had from Brian Burke. If people were not with him, they were agin him! People used to get favours: Laurie Connell got \$395 million worth of favours. Dallas Dempster was not such a good friend, and he got \$50 million. A client of mine was on the receiving end of Brian Burke's thuggery when he did not do what Mr Burke wanted him to do. Brian Burke said, "You'll lose government contracts if you do that." Unfortunately, my client decided not to prosecute. If it were not for the fact that I am not allowed to tell members who my client is, I would love to say what Brian Burke did. That is the thuggery we had from Brian Burke.

How long has it taken the Government to revert to using thuggery? I suspect it has not taken any time; it has been there all along. In the first year of this Government, the unions were intimidating workers - not employers. If unions want to intimidate employers, they first have to intimidate workers, so they can use them to intimidate the employers. The unions have spent a whole year intimidating the workers. Now the fine words are gone.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.24 pm
