

WESTERN POWER, PRIVATISATION POLICY DIFFERENCES

48. Mr J.J.M. BOWLER to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to revelations that the former Minister for Energy canvassed the privatisation of Western Power. Will the minister outline the policy differences between the Government and the Opposition on this issue?

Mr E.S. RIPPER replied:

I can give the member a clear and unambiguous answer about the Labor Government's position. The Gallop Government has no intention of privatising all or part of Western Power. We have had some discussion about integrity testing regarding the royal commission. This is an important integrity test for the Opposition, because it wants to present itself as an alternative Government. The picture with the Opposition on the privatisation of Western Power is much less clear. Last week the Government revealed the existence of the Macquarie Corporate Finance report that canvassed the privatisation of Western Power in April 1998. The Parliament and the public were never told about that report. At first the Leader of the Opposition, who is now trying to reinvent himself, said that it had nothing to do with him and he never had any intention to privatise Western Power.

Mr J.H.D. Day: That is totally irrelevant and you are making yourself irrelevant.

The SPEAKER: The interjections by the member for Darling Range are irrelevant because he did not ask the question, and he knows the rules in this place. I call the member for Darling Range to order for the second time.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Leader of the Opposition is, of course, a serial privatiser. However, he would have the public and the Parliament believe that somehow he is a changed man. We still have not had a satisfactory explanation from him of why he did not tell the public about the report. Therefore, he has failed that integrity test that any leader of an alternative Government should be able to pass. Members should listen to his claim that the report had nothing to do with him. According to the government media monitoring unit transcript of his comments on Paul Murray's program on 2 March 2004, he said -

That report, I have got a vague memory of it, it was a report done by Western Power's management, looking into the corporate structure of Western Power, any organisation does that. Macquarie, I mean, their business is privatisation, so they're obviously going to put that forward. But that was a report done by Western Power's board, nothing to do with me . . . I have an open mind, I always look at issues. We will not privatise Western Power.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I missed the last sentence. What was the last sentence?

Mr E.S. RIPPER: That is right, member for Hillarys. Anyone listening to those comments would form the distinct impression that the Leader of the Opposition had nothing to do with the report and that it did not matter anyway because he is not, and never has been, in favour of privatising Western Power. I have new information that shows that, far from being an innocent bystander, the Leader of the Opposition was intimately involved in the development of this report. I have an extract of the minutes, dated 2 February 1998, of a meeting between the then managing director of Western Power, David Eiszele, and the then minister. The document states -

We discussed the key strategies . . . requiring his input namely competition problems, market reform options and capital restructure.

He -

That is, the then minister -

again stated he had no plans to break up WP and asked WP to plan for a one-third equity sale along the Telstra lines.

He asked the then managing director of Western Power to plan for one-third of Western Power to be privatised. Far from having nothing at all to do with the privatisation report, the Leader of the Opposition actually commissioned Western Power to prepare a sale plan. He has failed this integrity test. It is another integrity test that he has failed. How are members of the public to make a judgment about the Leader of the Opposition's position? Is he genuinely against the privatisation of Western Power, or is he just trying to cover up his plans to privatise Western Power by stealth, starting with the power stations? After the cover-up of the Macquarie Corporate Finance report in 1998, and after the dissembling on Paul Murray's program, the public of Western Australia has a right to be suspicious. I believe that the people of Western Australia have a right to a full and thorough explanation from the leader of the purported alternative Government in this State.

Point of Order

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Minister for Energy is quoting from an official document in this Parliament and I ask that he table the full document.

The SPEAKER: It is true that if a minister quotes from an official document, he should present that document for tabling.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I am happy to table the document. It might be news to the member for Hillarys because perhaps the Leader of the Opposition did not tell all his colleagues what he was actually doing.

[See paper No 2164.]