

WESTERN POWER, BREAK-UP COSTS

61. Mr J.H.D. DAY to the Minister for Energy:

I refer the minister to the “Report on Consultants Engaged by Government for the Six Months Ended 30th June 2003” and the nearly \$3 million spent under the energy portfolio on consultants’ reports.

- (1) Can the minister confirm that this figure represents the cost of consultancies primarily on the Government’s failed plan to break up Western Power over that six-month period?
- (2) Can the minister also confirm that this is only a small part of the cost of a plan that is no longer proceeding?
- (3) Will the Government now state approximately how much money the Government has spent so far on the plan to break up Western Power?

Mr E.S. RIPPER replied:

- (1)-(3) The Opposition is all over the place on electricity reform, because right now the Opposition is supporting in the Parliament the Electricity Industry Bill, which provides for the establishment of an electricity market. One of the consultancy reports about which the Opposition apparently complains has the following purpose: “review the electricity market model that was proposed by the Electricity Reform Task Force”. The member for Darling Range complains about the consultancy and the investigation, while at the same time he supports the legislation that provides for the establishment of the electricity market. That is point one. Point two is that if the member for Darling Range read the consultancy report, he would see that the majority of the consultancies in the energy portfolio were not to do with electricity reform. I have looked through that report. I think less than one-third of the figures relate to electricity reform. The other figures relate to some ongoing issues that are important to Western Power, such as power procurement for new power stations both in the regions and on the south west interconnected system. The whole premise of the question from the member for Darling Range is wrong. At the very least we can say this about the Government: we actually table the consultancies that we commission, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, who misleadingly advised the Premier and Cabinet about the consultancy that had been commissioned by Western Power and called it capital structure, not the path to privatisation -

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Minister for Energy has just implied that the Leader of the Opposition purposely misled Cabinet, which is a reflection on the Leader of the Opposition as a member of this House. I suggest also that the Leader of the House was quoting from official documents, and he should table those official documents.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I have tabled them.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I have not seen them. I ask that they be tabled as well.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not consider that the statement was unparliamentary.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Not only was misleading advice provided to the then Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet, but also no advice was provided to the Parliament and the public. Opposition members demand of the Gallop Labor Government a standard of accountability that they were not prepared to accept when they were in government. It is not only a question of history. It is also a question of how they deal with these situations now. This is what *The West Australian* reports today with regard to what the Leader of the Opposition’s spokesperson said about the “Path to Privatisation” report -

Mr Barnett’s spokeswoman said the memo could not be relied on because it was simply Mr Eiszele’s interpretation of a meeting.

Yesterday we tabled in this place evidence that the Leader of the Opposition, when he was Minister for Energy, had asked Western Power to prepare a plan for the privatisation of that organisation. However, the Leader of the Opposition’s spokesperson has said that the memo could not be relied on because it was simply Mr Eiszele’s interpretation of a meeting. What I want to know is: does the Leader of the Opposition stand by that misleading comment by his spokesperson, or has he taken action to discipline his spokesperson for that misleading piece of advice to *The West Australian*? However, the game was up for the Leader of the Opposition and he could no longer, in the face of the documentary evidence, deny what was obvious to all. The Leader of the Opposition finally came clean to a certain extent on this issue when he said on 10 March on the Paul Murray program on radio 6PR -

Yeah, the piece of paper that Eric Ripper was waving around was a memo from David Eiszele to other senior managers in Western Power, and it talked about a discussion we had about a part privatisation. Paul, that was six years ago and it was at a time when there was a lot of debate about privatisation, and I never shied away from discussing those issues.

If that is so, why did his spokesperson say that Mr Eiszele's interpretation of the meeting could not be relied on? I think that is to shy away from discussing these issues. I caution the Leader of the Opposition about what he says on this issue, because so far every time he has made a comment he has been caught out. When the Leader of the Opposition was Minister for Energy, he had a plan for the privatisation of Western Power. Deep within the Liberal Party there is still a plan for the privatisation of Western Power. They just do not want to talk about it right now.