

WESTERN POWER, GOVERNMENT'S POLICY

561. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to a recent media report in which the Leader of the National Party refused to rule out the privatisation of Western Power. What is the Government's policy?

Mr E.S. RIPPER replied:

Only one party in this Parliament is not flirting with the privatisation of Western Power: the Australian Labor Party. The member is quite correct to point out that a couple of weeks ago at a National Party forum the shadow Minister for Energy strayed from the script.

Mr M.W. Trenorden interjected.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Leader of the National Party has interjected and asked me to quote what he said. I am very happy to quote it. On Friday, 3 September he was reported on ABC radio as saying that he would not rule out the privatisation of Western Power. He is reported as saying -

And there will be some people in there arguing that we should keep the current system, but . . . I'm not one of those people. I think there clearly has to be change.

His candour was not rewarded, because within hours of that story going to air, the Leader of the Opposition stepped in and gagged the Leader of the National Party, the deputy leader of the coalition, and attempted to put the genie back in the bottle. That is the kind of treatment that the National Party should get used to because that is what happens when it goes into coalition with the Liberal Party. National Party members never get their way. They get stomped on, put down and have no impact whatsoever.

As well as putting down the National Party the Leader of the Opposition spoke some weasel words. There is one thing much worse than blunt language in politics; it is weasel words of the sort that we get from the Leader of the Opposition on privatisation. The Leader of the Opposition said that the coalition wanted to retain Western Power as a government-owned utility, but what he did not say was more important. He did not rule out the privatisation of individual power stations. In other words, he is saying that he will not sell Western Power from the top down; he will sell Western Power from the bottom up. The State will end up with a power utility with no power stations at all. That is his hidden secret plan. We know that the Leader of the Opposition has a promise for every person. We also know that a leopard does not change its spots. The Leader of the National Party wanted quotes. I will give him another quote from the Leader of the Opposition in the *Western Australian Business News* of 7 November 2002 when he said -

If we had been in power one of Western Power's generators would have been privatised by now . . .

We have been through this before. In the lead-up to the 1996 election the Court Government said that it had no plans to sell AlintaGas. As soon as the coalition was elected the current Leader of the Opposition broke that promise. He sold the state-owned gas company. He failed that integrity test at that time. Eight years on he now faces another integrity test. Will he give Western Australians a cast-iron guarantee that the coalition will not sell all or part of Western Power? Will he deny the truth of this article on the front page of *The West Australian* written by an eminent journalist, Mr Paul Armstrong? Let him say that it is not so, but he cannot do so credibly.