

MR ROSS BROMELL, GEOGRAPHE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Grievance

MR B.K. MASTERS (Vasse) [9.07 am]: I direct my grievance to the Minister for Education, and I thank him for being present in the Chamber to hear me.

Four weeks ago, I was contacted by Mr Frank Busby, who is a gardener at the Busselton Primary School. Along with five other people, Mr Busby applied for a two-day-a-week position as a gardener at the relatively new Geographe Primary School. Given that Mr Busby was working only part-time at the Busselton Primary School, an extra two days a week would have suited him very well. Mr Busby was unsuccessful in his application, and, under normal circumstances, he would happily have accepted that the best person was appointed to the job and would have let the matter rest. However, Mr Busby was caused considerable distress after certain facts came to light and after certain events took place.

The successful applicant was Ross Bromell, a former landscape gardener, who, given that he also worked part-time, was, in theory, a potentially acceptable candidate. However, Mr Bromell works two days a week as Hon Adele Farina's research officer, and he was the ALP candidate who ran against me at the last election. Mr Bromell's wife works at the Geographe Primary School. The rumour mill has it that Mr Bromell and Hon Adele Farina are cousins or related in some other way. Mr Bromell has been criticised in the upper House of this Parliament for the tasks he has performed for the Labor Government as a de facto representative of the Government. Mr Bromell previously worked at a primary school in Perth at which Mr Shortill was principal. None of those six points I just referred to may be of any significance. However, of great significance is the fact that Mr Bromell is understood to have been asked by the principal of Geographe Primary School, John Shortill, whether he wanted the job and, if he did, to apply for it. I am unable to state how I know that Mr Shortill contacted Mr Bromell about this offer, but another party has informed Mr Busby of this action by Mr Shortill. Sensitivities must be taken on board to protect the identity of this informant. If Mr Shortill thought that there would not be enough applicants for the gardeners position at his school, why did he not phone the three gardeners at the other government schools in Busselton, Dunsborough and Vasse, who are themselves part-timers and who may well have been looking for an extra -

The SPEAKER: I remind all members that the use of people's names and the like under parliamentary privilege is something that should be done with exceptional caution because of the nature of parliamentary privilege. Even though the individual has a right of the reply, it is imperative that members exercise great restraint when naming people in this place and saying that rumours suggest certain things. There is an obligation on members to be certain of their facts before they name people in this place. I caution the member for Vasse and ask members generally to reflect upon the importance of research before making certain allegations.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I appreciate your comments, Mr Speaker. In relation to the rumour, that is all it is. I did not state it as fact but simply made the point.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr B.K. MASTERS: Also of concern is the fact that Mr Shortill was chairman of the selection board that met to assess the applicants and choose the successful person. I understand that Mr Shortill advised the other two people on the board that he knew Mr Bromell. However, there is doubt as to whether he advised them that he had asked Mr Bromell to apply or that he had virtually offered Mr Bromell the position.

Mr Busby is an award-winning school gardener. In 2000, his excellent work at Busselton Primary School was recognised when he was given the title of the best school gardener in Busselton. It is not surprising that Mr Busby objected to Mr Bromell's appointment. However, when he phoned the Department of Education to lodge his objection or discuss it, he was told that he had a two-week appeal period in which to put in a formal application. Coincidentally, this written appeal had to be lodged with Mr Shortill. The minister can clearly see the problems that this would have created in terms of whether Mr Busby was likely to have his appeal treated in a fair manner. Not only that, but his two-week appeal period coincided with the July school holidays, during which Mr Shortill was away for most of the time. Mr Busby's appeal was unsuccessful. When he asked why his initial application failed, he was told that his written application did not meet the normal departmental standards. Yet, Mr Busby has been a state public servant for eight years and believed that he filled out the application form to the standard indicated on the form. Mr Busby believes that he and the other applicants have been unfairly treated because Mr Bromell is, if not a friend, a well-known acquaintance of the principal, Mr Shortill. The accusation is that this friendship caused Mr Bromell to be given preferential treatment by Mr Shortill so that all other applicants for the part-time gardeners position were essentially given little or no chance of having their application considered on equal terms with that of Mr Bromell.

I understand that the Department of Education is aware of the lack of procedural fairness in the way in which Mr Bromell was selected for the position. I also understand that Mr Shortill has been told never to undertake a job assessment process again in this way at the primary school.

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Speaker, the member for Vasse is not only infringing the warning that you provided to him earlier, but also reading his speech, which is clearly against standing orders. He should only refer to notes when making his speech and not read his speech.

The SPEAKER: Firstly, the statement I made was to warn members that if they abuse the right of parliamentary privilege, other actions will no doubt follow in relation to a person's right of reply. Secondly, the practice of using extensive notes is not new to this place. Even though members should not prepare fully written speeches, the practice of using extensive notes has happened on both sides of the House on numerous occasions and it is accepted that members may refer to them.

Debate Resumed

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I also advise the minister that Mr Shortill, in my opinion, has done an excellent job of bringing the new Geographe Primary School on stream. Regardless of the outcome of this grievance, I hope that Mr Shortill continues as principal of that school, as I am sure that he will continue to do an excellent job.

It is my belief that Mr Bromell may have been given preferential treatment when he was selected for the position of gardener at Geographe Primary School. While there is nothing wrong with the principal asking a person, friend or otherwise, to apply for a vacant position, it is certainly wrong to indicate to that person that the job is his if he wants it. There is the question of why Mr Shortill did not personally approach the three part-time school gardeners in the Shire of Busselton if he was genuinely concerned that there might not be enough quality applicants for the vacant position at his school. There is the question of whether the selection board was fully informed by Mr Shortill of his virtual offer of employment to Mr Bromell. There is the question of whether an application for a school gardener's position needs to meet the same high presentation standards as an application for a teaching or administration position. After all, many gardeners do what they do because their employment strengths lie in their practical hands-on skills, not in their writing abilities. There are so many concerns relating to the appointment of Mr Bromell to the payroll of the Department of Education that the minister should direct the department to fully review the application process for that position. Mr Shortill needs to explain his role in contacting Mr Bromell about the job and his influence on the selection board to the satisfaction of the minister and the department. To ensure that there has been absolute procedural fairness in the filling of the position, I request that the minister have his department fully investigate the issues raised.

MR A.J. CARPENTER (Willagee - Minister for Education) [9.17 am]: The only question not in that grievance is whether the member raising this matter has taken leave of his senses to the extent that he is no longer fit to be sitting in this Chamber.

In the process of listening to grievances, I have never heard such utter unadulterated garbage brought into this Chamber in the guise of a grievance. Other members in this House wanted to raise genuine grievances today but did not get in the queue because the member for Vasse was already there. If I had had any indication that this sort of filth and tripe was a part of the member's grievance, I would have told him to take the grievance and run it in the local community paper at the level of gossip mongering, which is what he has brought into this Chamber today. If that is the sort of behaviour that we will continue to see from the member for Vasse, he will not get another grievance until I see more detail.

Mr J.H.D. Day: It is not up to you to decide what he says.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Yes it is. I am not going to sit in this Chamber and listen to a member bring in completely unsubstantiated gossip, which we could all do every day of the week -

Mr J.H.D. Day: If you deal with the issue, you will do yourself a service.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Does the member for Darling Range support this grievance?

Mr J.H.D. Day: I did not hear much of it.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The member heard enough of it though. It is an absolute disgrace. The member for Vasse has picked up some gossip, some absolute rubbish, from his electorate. He has not had the courage to say to himself or to the people pedalling it that he was not interested unless he could see some substantiation. The member himself said that he did not have any substantiation to any assertion that he made; not one piece of evidence of substantiation. The member has launched a character assassination on virtually everybody involved in the process at the school, apart from one unsuccessful applicant. He said that the principal of that school had

acted in the most grossly inappropriate way and then, to cover the grubby, disgusting comments he had made, he said at the end of his grievance, "By the way, I think he is doing a good job." That is pathetic.

Mr P.D. Omodei: The minister should read *Hansard* tomorrow.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: That is just what he said. Does the member for Warren-Blackwood support what the member for Vasse has just done?

Mr P.D. Omodei: Just tell Parliament whether you will investigate the matter. If you won't, then sit down and shut up.

Withdrawal of Remark

The SPEAKER: I am sure the member for Warren-Blackwood did not mean to use that term and will withdraw it.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I withdraw.

Debate Resumed

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: To answer the member's interjection, I have absolutely no intention of investigating this rubbish. I have complete confidence that the process was carried out correctly. If someone has a genuine grievance with the process, he should do what everybody else does and take it through the correct channels. There are plenty of ways of appealing such processes inside the Department of Education.

Mr B.K. Masters: The appeal was dismissed.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I do not want to hear another word from the member. He has disgraced himself.

Before the last election I received countless items of rumour, gossip and innuendo about members on the other side of the Chamber, particularly the member for Cottesloe. Those rumours were circulated by his enemies in his electorate, and they urged me to raise them in the Chamber. I said no. I told them that it was a filth sheet and to take it away. The member for Vasse has brought that sort of rubbish in here. I am absolutely confident that the processes were carried out correctly. I have no information that would lead me to think that there was political interference, which is what the member alluded to, because Mr Bromell may be related to Hon Adele Farina and works for somebody in the area. So what?

Mr B.K. Masters: That is not what I said.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Why did the member raise it?

Mr B.K. Masters: You need to understand the big picture down there and how corrupt the -

Several members interjected.

Mr B.K. Masters: You have already been caught out once with him doing the Government's work down there. A member of the upper House of State Parliament was embarrassed for giving jobs to members of the Labor Party.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: This is a part-time, two-day-a-week gardening job. Does anybody in this Chamber believe that political interference goes on at that level? Does anyone on that side of the House operate at that level?

Mr B.K. Masters: I am not talking about political interference; you are.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: This is the worst case of abuse of this parliamentary procedure, which provides members of the Chamber with genuine opportunities to bring forward legitimate issues in their electorates. If what happened today continues to happen, the whole process will fall down.