

PRIVATISATION, GOVERNMENT POLICY

145. Mr BLOFFWITCH to the Premier:

Last weekend the Leader of the Opposition criticised the coalition Government's privatisation policy. Will the Premier outline the Government's position on privatisation?

Mr COURT replied:

Once again the Leader of the Opposition commented on privatisation and criticised a comment that I made that it would be irresponsible to rule out any privatisation in the next four years of government. The Leader of the Opposition is perpetrating a great big con with privatisation. The Leader of the Opposition says that he is opposed to privatisation, but one needs to read all the qualifying words. He says that the Labor Party will not privatise Western Power, the Water Corporation or the passenger rail business. Big deal! We have been in government for nearly eight years and have not privatised those bodies, have no plans to do it and will not do it in the next four years. I will read the Leader of the Opposition's comments on privatisation. He was formerly the Minister for Microeconomic Reform. I think it was under that banner or the banner of the minister assisting the Treasurer that he handled the privatisation of the State Government Insurance Office and the R & I Bank. Collie power station was to be a private power station. All of that was the responsibility of the Leader of the Opposition. In 1992 he said in this Parliament -

We have also seen Labor Governments move to privatise some activities -

Dr Gallop: You want to go back to the Tonkin Government.

Mr COURT: I will come forward to this year. He said -

It is my view that that does not represent a betrayal of the principle but merely a redrawing of the boundaries in acknowledgment of the changed circumstances of the 1990s.

The members for Perth and Morley . . . cannot simply attack this legislation on the basis that it represents privatisation. One has to produce a more sophisticated argument why this Government and this Parliament ought not allow a particular public asset to go out into the marketplace. Why should that not happen?

This year the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said -

I am stating the position of the Australian Labor Party on Western Australian matters and I am saying that we do not agree with the privatisation of strategic public utilities.

He also said -

We have reached the end of the viability of privatisation as a policy option in this country. The public does not support any more privatisation than has already occurred.

He also spoke of Labor's policy of no privatisation being implemented. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has a strong position of no privatisation.

Mr Ripper: Of strategic public utilities.

Mr COURT: Okay. Last year the Leader of the Opposition said that blanket opposition to all privatisations would be foolish. One might be confused at this point. What the Leader of the Opposition is saying is that the Labor Party has a privatisation policy. It has listed three areas that it will not privatise, but I listened very carefully to the Leader of the Opposition at the Public Service annual general meeting the other night. He did not rule out privatisation. He said that he is strongly opposed to contracting out unless it is in the public interest. He criticised me when I said it would be irresponsible to rule out any further privatisations or contracting out.

Dr Gallop: You should be clear on my position.

Mr COURT: What is it?

Dr Gallop: We are opposed to the privatisation of Western Power, the Water Corporation and the Westrail metropolitan service.

Mr COURT: What about everything else?

Dr Gallop: We will talk about the others when the time is right. We will be clear with the electors and you will not.

Mr COURT: I have already given a commitment on those three utilities.

Dr Gallop: You have not ruled them out at all.

Mr COURT: What about contracting out?

Dr Gallop: We have a very clear policy, unlike yours on that subject.

Mr Kierath: What is it?

Dr Gallop: Go and read it. It is on the Internet.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr COURT: In the past couple of days in a quiet atmosphere I was listening to the Premier of Victoria. He was explaining why the question about outsourcing and contracting out is now very much a part of the way his Government - the most recent Labor Government - is operating. This is what he said -

Frequently citing Victoria's experience with outsourcing, Mr Bracks said the key roles he saw for government were as a regulator, a purchaser of services, to explain its new role to the public and to focus on core services . . .

He said this role had changed all around the world and governments everywhere no longer provided every service.

He was speaking out strongly in support of outsourcing. The point I make is that the Leader of the Opposition has today confirmed three government bodies will not be privatised, but the rest could be. The Leader of the Opposition was the minister who led the push for privatisation. Because he now thinks it is popular, he should have the decency to spell out the Opposition's policies.