



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM
AMENDMENT (ELECTORAL INTEGRITY
AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2005**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Thursday, 30 March 2006

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Ciobo, Steven, MP

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Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (1.33 pm)—I am pleased to rise to speak on the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2005, because it embraces a number of the recommendations made by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, of which I have the privilege of being a member. As part of my role as a member of that committee I undertook to travel right across the length and breadth of Australia, talking to people from towns and cities and taking on board their advice about the ways in which we can make Australian democracy function even better than it currently does.

In due course I would like to turn my mind to some of the hypocritical remarks made by the member for Wills, which underscore the attitude of the Australian Labor Party in this debate. Time and time again, we see the Australian Labor Party say one thing in this chamber but do the complete opposite in reality. I will come to those remarks in a moment.

At this stage I would like to focus on a couple of key points—that is, to acknowledge the hard and diligent work performed by the chair of the committee, Mr Tony Smith, the member for Casey, as well as the hard work put in by Senators Brandis and Mason and me and Ms Sophie Panopoulos, whose electorate name escapes me—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lindsay)—Indi.

Mr CIOBO—The member for Indi, thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The committee functioned very well and played an important role in undertaking dialogue with people across a variety of places throughout Australia, including the residents in the town of Innisfail, which, as we know, was unfortunately very adversely affected by the recent passage of Cyclone Larry through the area.

This bill before the chamber today contains a number of key recommendations that flowed from the committee's report. These recommendations were taken upon the best evidence that came before the committee. These recommendations flow from the overwhelming weight of evidence that the committee took from Australians throughout the country. A number of them made the point very strongly that, through some tweaking and some changes, our very good system could become even better.

It was also troubling for me to learn of some ways in which potential weaknesses in our electoral system were exploited by minor parties and, indeed, in some instances exploited by major parties. I think it is very important that the chamber pass this bill and that the Senate pass this bill so that all Australians can rest more comfortably in the knowledge that those democratic institutions empowered with ensuring that the will of the Australian people is best reflected in the election result are able to do so and that the result is a true reflection of the will of the people.

We have seen instances in the past, as brought out in the Shepherdson inquiry in Queensland, where the Australian Labor Party ruthlessly and nefariously exploited our electoral system to their advantage in marginal Labor seats. And I know certainly that within the state of Queensland there is widespread community concern that we should never again see people like Mike Kaiser elected to roles in state parliament when they have had their hands dirtied by what have been shown by the Shepherdson inquiry to be grubby political tricks, which actually resulted in that particular member resigning from the Queensland state parliament.

At this stage I would like to turn my attention to some comments that were made by the member for Wills. We saw the outrage and the feigned indignation from the Australian Labor Party as the member for Wills stood in this chamber and spoke at length, saying that increasing the political donations threshold would open up the potential for the Australian parliament to be corrupted. We saw the feigned indignation from the Australian Labor Party as they purported to explain that increasing the disclosure limit to \$10,000, with the opportunity for there perhaps to be multiple donations through a number of divisions, in some way is the end of the bona fides of the Australian political system. In typical Labor Party style, it is a case of not listening to what they say but watching what they do. The member for Wills's comments reflect comments that were made by Mr Griffin, who had this to say on political donations in this very place on 29 March this year. He said a claim that amounts of \$10,000 and below were not enough to improperly influence political parties:

... completely ignores the fact that ... a party can receive multiple donations from the same donor. This fact clearly increases the chances of corrupt behaviour ...

Sound familiar? That sounds remarkably like the member for Wills. He continued:

... you would not have to be Einstein to work out that as the amounts of money increase so do the chances of inappropriate, or even corrupt, behaviour.

Again, that sounds remarkably like the previous speaker in this debate. This is where it gets very interesting, because the Australian union movement have written the rule book and are streets ahead of anybody else when it comes to multiple donations and the opportunity to buy your way into this parliament or the opportunity to buy your way when it comes to policy. In 2004-05 more than 260 separate donations from unions flowed to the Australian Labor Party, the party whose members have the audacity to come into this chamber and lecture us on why this is a bad move—260 separate donations from the Australian union movement. That is the reason that the Australian Labor Party is a completely owned element of the Australian trade union movement.

In 2004-05 the top five multiple union donors to the ALP were: fifth, the AMWU with 27 separate donations to the value of \$325,455; fourth, the CEPU with 31 donations totalling \$238,333; third, the TWU with 32 donations totalling \$99,996; second, the CFMEU with 46 donations to the amount of \$890,752; and, coming in at first place, the MUA with 47 separate donations to the tune of \$78,350. Just for the top five that is a total of 183 separate donations from the trade union movement to the tune of some \$1.6 million. By its own admission, the Australian Labor Party believes that receipt of multiple donations 'clearly', to use the quotation of the Australian Labor Party, 'increases the chances' of corruption.

Mr Albanese—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order on a similar argument to that put by the member for Moncrieff before. The member referred to the honourable member for Bruce's comments at the beginning. He is now talking about corruption. He has put an argument against himself, because he knows all those union donations were declared—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lindsay)—The member will not debate the point of order. The member for Grayndler will resume his seat. The member for Moncrieff will link his comments to the bill being discussed.

Mr CIOBO—Mr Deputy Speaker, my comments are directly linked to the comments that were made by the member for Wills. The member for Wills stood in this chamber making the claim that multiple donations open up opportunities for corruption, yet we see that the Australian Labor Party is the key recipient of multiple donations from the trade union movement. I wonder how much inappropriate and corrupt behaviour 260 individual donations from the union movement buys in the Australian Labor Party.

Mr Albanese—I rise on a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. My point of order, under standing order 91(e), is that he has repeated the allegation, this time against a separate member—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Grayndler will resume his seat now. That was not a point of order. The member for Moncrieff is linking his comments to the bill quite directly.

Mr CIOBO—Let me repeat what I said, because clearly the member for Grayndler is not listening. I am simply posing the question. When the ALP says multiple donations buy corruption, I simply ask how much inappropriate and corrupt behaviour—

Mr Albanese—On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: the member for Moncrieff has repeated the allegation. The ALP's position is that undisclosed donations are potentially corrupt. It is very clear that he has linked those

comments to a number of members and I ask him to withdraw what he has said and stop repeating what is a wrong statement.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I thank the member for Grayndler and call the member for Moncrieff.

Mr CIOBO—So it is very clear that the union movement with 260 individual donations would appear, if you follow the logic of the member for Wills, to be in a situation where they are able to have perhaps inappropriate and corrupt influences on the Australian Labor Party.

Mr Albanese—Mr Deputy Speaker—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Member for Grayndler, I hope this is not a tedious point of order.

Mr Albanese—On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: the member persists in linking in the same sentence names of my colleagues and corruption. He persists in doing it. This is the fourth time that he has done it. I ask him to withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I thank the member for Grayndler. The member for Grayndler will resume his seat. I am not going to ask the member to withdraw. The member for Grayndler will know that this is a very important bill. The debate with the member for Wills was wide ranging; the chair allowed that to occur. In this instance what I am hearing is the effects of political donations on various parties.

Mr CIOBO—I do not wish to drag the debate down and get bogged on this one point, so I will move on. There are other areas of significant concern to me as well. But I want to refute the accusation made by the Australian Labor Party and question their logic when they come into this House and criticise the electoral reforms before the House when it is very clear that they are one of the key beneficiaries of multiple union donations. I simply question the logic that applies and suggest that it is nothing but an exercise in absolute and total hypocrisy.

I want to turn to another aspect that was particularly concerning to me. As part of the inquiry, I learned about the way in which liberals for forests conducted themselves. It appears the Labor member for Richmond was a direct beneficiary of what I would consider to be absolutely corrupt practices by the liberals for forests.

Mr Bowen—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: it is highly disorderly for the member for Moncrieff to question the integrity of another member and to make imputations about another member. It is highly disorderly of him, and he should withdraw that suggestion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—I will listen very closely, but I do not believe the member for Moncrieff tied that to the member.

Mr CIOBO—The Australian Labor Party may not like the fact that the member for Richmond is in this parliament because of some kind of dodgy deal by liberals for forests that managed to convince and confuse—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—If the member for Moncrieff wants to make that type of statement, he has to do it by substantive motion.

Mr CIOBO—The finding of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters was that the member for Richmond was a beneficiary—

Mr Bowen—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: it matters nought what the committee found. The honourable member for Moncrieff is making an imputation against another member, and it is highly disorderly.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—What is the standing order that you are taking the point of order on?

Mr Bowen—Mr Deputy Speaker, I refer you to page 500 of *House of Representatives Practice*.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—That is not correct.

Mr Albanese—Mr Deputy Speaker, on the point of order: I believe 'Reflections on members' is—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I have already ruled on that, Member for Grayndler. I will listen very carefully.

Mr CIOBO—I make no apologies for standing up for those residents of Tweed Heads, for those residents in Richmond, who were misled by liberals for forests tickets. I make no apology for the fact that the residents who

were misled—and we had them appear before the committee—explained to us how the liberals for forests how-to-vote card was deliberately done in a way to confuse them. A number of them said they were confused. They thought they were voting for a Liberal when their votes were flowing to the Australian Labor Party.

Mr Albanese—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: standing order 90, ‘Reflections on members’, says: ‘All imputations—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Grayndler will resume his seat. The member for Moncrieff at the present time is not mentioning a member. The member for Moncrieff is talking about the report and the evidence that was given to the committee.

Mr CIOBO—I am astounded that the Australian Labor Party is unable to hear the simple facts, which were the findings of the committee after its inquiry into the 2004 federal election. It is clearly the case that voters in the seat of Richmond were confused by a highly misleading and deceptive how-to-vote card—which the liberals for forests issued—with preferences flowing to the Australian Labor Party.

Liberals for forests in Richmond secured approximately 1,500 votes, despite the liberals for forests candidates not even turning up in the seat of Richmond to campaign, despite the liberals for forests candidate in Richmond living in Sydney and despite the liberals for forests candidate doing essentially no advertising or campaigning of any kind. Despite these facts, 1,500 people voted for liberals for forests. The finding of the committee is that if only one in 10 people had been misled by the liberals for forests how-to-vote ticket out of those 1,500 people who voted for liberals for forests—and we took evidence directly from people who were misled by the liberals for forests ticket—the outcome would have been different. The Labor member for Richmond won by 150 votes.

In my view, it is a simple case of a large number of people being deceived in the seat of Richmond, and the beneficiary of that deception was the Labor member for Richmond. People are angry about that deception, and they have every right to be. So I welcome one of the key initiatives in the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2005, which is to ensure that this problem will no longer be allowed or permitted to exist. I welcome the fact that a key finding of this committee has been adopted so that this problem will not occur again and the Australian Labor Party will not see one of their candidates elected—whether through some deliberate deal or as a beneficiary of a deal as occurred in the seat of Richmond—because of a deceptive how-to-vote card that the liberals for forests candidate issued in that seat.

There are a number of other key measures that I would like to touch upon in the very short amount of time that I have left. With regard to the disclosure thresholds, I simply have not heard any sound argument that highlights the way in which a \$10,000 donation is going to buy any MP. The increase from the amount that was introduced 20 years ago is barely in line with inflation. This increase that the Australian Labor Party rail so strongly against does nothing other than effectively allow the disclosure limit to be CPI indexed. That is hardly a radical concept. The Australian Labor Party can come into this chamber and attribute all sorts of motives behind this increase, but let us put on the record the clear motive, the very simple motive, that it is nothing more than CPI indexation. These kinds of reactionary comments from the Australian Labor Party underscore the fact that they are engaged in a scare campaign about this issue as they do on so many other issues.

I would also like to touch briefly on the early closure of the rolls. We have seen in the Shepherdson inquiry in Queensland that the Australian Labor Party has deliberately rorted enrolments, has deliberately rorted those people who are seeking to enrol and has created fictitious people who enrolled in marginal seats. We saw this happen in Queensland to benefit the Australian Labor Party. So is it any wonder that the committee recommended that there be an earlier closure of the rolls than is currently the case? The reason is that the current closure of the rolls and thousands and the thousands of enrolments that flow in simply do not provide the AEC with the appropriate amount of time required to ensure the bona fides of those who have enrolled. (*Time expired*)