



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

Prime Minister

Attempted Censure

SPEECH

Tuesday, 23 February 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Burke, Tony, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:24): I thought they had changed Prime Minister. I thought we were told that there was going to be new respect for the intelligence of the Australian people. I thought people had a sense that the new Prime Minister would change the culture of the Liberal Party. We were told that he would change the Liberal Party, but no, the Liberal Party has changed him from the moment he got that job. There is no doubt at all.

Do we remember earlier in this term someone standing up when his own words were quoted to him and saying, 'I never said that'? Do we remember? We were told: 'I never made that promise. I never gave that guarantee.' At least then the promises were months old that the person was denying. This bloke, this new Prime Minister, within a day is saying that he never said it. Within a day, within 24 hours, he is wanting to deny it.

It is unusual for a Prime Minister to speak to a suspension of the standing orders motion. It is more unusual for the Prime Minister to not defend himself during that speech. There was not a moment during that speech when the Prime Minister disagreed with a word of the motion. There was not a single moment when the Prime Minister said that the statement that he made yesterday was in any way anything other than an inaccurate statement. You do not often get the situation where you are dealing with a Prime Minister having misled the parliament. You certainly very rarely get the situation where you realise he has misled the parliament because his office has told you, because his office has provided the information directly to the media up there, in policy desperation, saying: 'Don't worry what our boss said. It is actually not the case at all.'

On the way into question time today one of my colleagues said to me, 'What if the Prime Minister stands up at the beginning and just acknowledges that the wrong words came out and it was an incorrect statement'? How could we have thought for a moment that that man would have anything other than the arrogance that we saw on display today, the arrogance which says that he can never claim that he has made an error, can never claim that he has made a mistake? The words yesterday were unequivocal. The words yesterday were:

... increasing capital gains tax is no part of our thinking whatsoever.

That is what he said and yet within minutes his own office is out there saying: 'Well, it is still on the table. We are still considering it.' The talking points were distributed by his office. How can it be 'no part of your thinking whatsoever' when you are telling your backbench and your frontbench to run the line?

Who would have thought that the minister for resources would let down the team by saying, 'I think that is a very clear statement from the Prime Minister'? Who would have thought that a member of your own cabinet is giving the most damaging comment possible when they are backing you in? That is exactly what happened when the minister for resources gave that interview. And from *The AFR* as well:

A spokesman for the Prime Minister, who has seven investment properties, claimed afterwards Mr Turnbull was still open to tightening the tax deduction for losses on negatively geared investment, and reducing the capital gains tax discount for investors ...

There is absolutely no way of reconciling those words with the claim that 'increasing capital gains tax is no part of our thinking whatsoever'.

When you have made a mistake like that there is a moment when most people would have some sort of humility somewhere inside them that they would be able to stand up and say, 'No, there was an error.' But the smartest person in the universe cannot do that. The smartest person in the universe has to get back and say, 'You just don't understand me.'

An opposition member interjecting—

Mr BURKE: There is a point; that is true. Realise you are not just saying that to the Labor Party; you are saying that to the minister for resources, who thought you were clear, you are saying it to your own backbench and you are saying it to your own office. You are spreading that arrogance to the Australian people, who simply want to be able to have what they were told this Prime Minister would deliver—that there would be a debate which could respect the intelligence of the Australian people. The Australian people have a right to say that yesterday the parliament was misled. They also have a right to say that there should not be a case where people get more help from the government for their second or 10th home than they get for their first home. It is a fundamental issue of fairness to be able to deal with it. It is a fundamental issue to be able to deal with that. Then this morning the Minister for Finance was running a mile—absolutely running a mile.

Mr Pasin interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Barker is warned now.

Mr BURKE: A question from Virginia Trioli: 'Any changes to the capital gains tax discount—yes or no?' (*Time expired*)

The SPEAKER: The question is that the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition be agreed to.