



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Gillard Government

SPEECH

Thursday, 7 February 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Brandis, Sen George

Source Senate
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:13): I move:

That the Senate take note of answers given by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (Senator Conroy) to questions without notice asked by Opposition senators today.

On 13 November 1991 Mr Eddie Obeid gave his maiden speech in the New South Wales parliament and in that speech Mr Obeid thanked his many friends in the New South Wales branch of the Australian Labor Party. Among the many friends that Mr Obeid thanked in the New South Wales branch of the Australian Labor Party were one John Della Bosca, one Graham Richardson and one Bob Carr—now Senator Bob Carr, Australia's very disappointing foreign minister. As we have learned though in recent days, Mr Obeid's network of friendships extends far wider than the New South Wales branch of the Labor Party. It extends down the generations because, as we have learned in recent days, so friendly is Mr Tony Burke, a senior member of the cabinet of Julia Gillard, with Mr Obeid that Mr Burke was afforded the hospitality of Mr Obeid's ski lodge by Mr Obeid. Lo and behold, we also learned that Senator Stephen Conroy, now the third most senior minister in the Commonwealth of Australia—chilling, isn't it, Senator Wong, to think that Senator Conroy is the third most senior minister in the Commonwealth of Australia—was also the beneficiary of Mr Obeid's hospitality.

We in the opposition do not assert any particular wrongdoing against Senator Conroy but there is a deeper question here and the deeper question goes to the networks of influence and patronage and mateship and favours which define the culture of the New South Wales branch of the Labor Party and in particular the right faction of the New South Wales branch of the Labor Party, of which Mr Burke is a member, and its sister faction in Victoria, the Victorian Right, of which Senator Conroy is the leader and which faction holds in office this discredited Prime Minister, Ms Julia Gillard. That network of undue influence, favours, friendships and protection defines the culture of the Labor Party.

On occasions I have been known for some flights of rhetorical fantasy when it comes to the inequity of the Australian Labor Party, its culture of criminality and corruption but I could not do better than what its own federal vice-president Mr Tony Sheldon had to say in a speech which Mr Sheldon gave last weekend. Mr Sheldon said:

Our crisis—

speaking of the Labor Party—

is more than just a crisis of trust brought on by the corrupt behaviour of property scammers and lobbyists. It's a crisis of belief brought on by a lack of moral and political purpose.

Mr Sheldon went on to say that 'there must be no underestimating of the gravity of the crisis here and in New South Wales, no blame shifting and no dodging of the responsibility to set things right'. Very significantly, Mr Sheldon went on to say that what he had to say about the New South Wales Labor Right had 'strong relevance to every state branch and every faction in the country'. So this is not just a problem for New South Wales and it is not just a problem for the right wing of the Australian Labor Party. It is, according to their own federal vice-president, part of a culture endemic in every faction in every state across the Australian Labor Party. No wonder that people in each of the states have got wise and successively tossed the Labor Party from office in four states and no doubt will do the same in the Commonwealth this year.