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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

Transport Administration Amendment (Transport Entities) Bill 2017

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I make a contribution to the debate on the Transport Administration Amendment (Transport Entities) Bill 2017.

I want to address the Berejiklian Government's early-stage attempts to ready the public transport system for privatisation. I spoke just last week in this place about the toxic, twisted priorities of the Berejiklian-O'Farrell-Baird Government as it relates to public transport.

There have been three Premiers in six years, but the agenda remains the same. Privatisation is the mantra of this Government and every Liberal Government that has come before it. It is disgraceful. Its only reason for being is to take public assets owned by the people of New South Wales and, through crooked deals, hand those assets off to the private sector at a discount price.

This bill is to separate the rail transport system. Naturally there is some jiggery-pokery going on that will make the budget appear to have a healthier surplus. But that sleight of hand is almost a sideshow to the main event. What we see here is the beginning of the rail system being broken up so that it can be privatised. Just as we saw with Sydney Ferries, the unprofitable assets are hived off into a separate company and the service delivery side of it—the frontline staff, ticketing, customer service—is all franchised to the private sector. That is what will happen with trains too. By moving the unprofitable and costly asset management functions into a different organisation the frontline service delivery can be sold off to the private sector.

I was reading an article in the *New York Times* last night as I was preparing for today's parliamentary sitting. The columnist, Owen Jones, reminded us of the words of the former Conservative UK Prime Minister, John Major, who said privatisation would bring "better, cheaper and more effective service for the commuter". Mr Jones observed that to repeat that claim to the beleaguered passengers travelling on the hopeless British rail system today would provoke mirthless laughter.

Recent polling in Britain reveals that 58 per cent of Britons believe rail privatisation is a complete or partial failure, while only 13 per cent rate it as a success. A 2013 report by the UK Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change found that British taxpayers are spending far more on funding the privatised system than they ever did on the nationalised system of old. There you have it—a railway system that is unreliable and inefficient, which passengers rate as a complete failure and which costs the taxpayers more.

The only beneficiaries of such an absurd arrangement are big businesses and private sector chums of the Tory politicians who signed off on these crooked deals.

And so it goes.

Faced with a similarly crooked deal being cobbled together by these Tory politicians opposite, Labor has no choice but to vote against this legislation. We have very grave concerns about the shady motives of this New South Wales Liberal Government. We can see it fattening this pig for market, and we are calling it for what it is.

My comrades in the Rail, Tram and Bus Union [RTBU] are similarly appalled by the idea. Alex Claassens of the RTBU says:

This reeks of yet another step towards the privatisation of our public transport services. The Baird Government must come clean with the NSW public about any future plans to privatise our public services.

Mr Claassens has belled the cat there for us all. It is a very common rhetorical flourish of the shonk-merchants in this Government to tell New South Wales taxpayers that there are no current plans for this or for that.

The Government said there were no current plans to privatise Wyong Hospital, but it is privatising it.

The Government said there were no current plans to sell Land and Property Information, but it is selling it this week to some of its Cayman Island connections.

The Government said there were no current plans to sell Sydney Water, but we should not count on that.

The list goes on and on.

When this Government says there are no current plans for something, it is thumbing its nose at us and saying we cannot prove anything. It is trite to say so, but actions do speak louder than words, and the actions of this Liberal Government, aided and abetted by the lapdogs in The Nationals, speak volumes.

The Government is desperately looking for government assets and public service agencies it can sell off before it gets thrown out of office in 2019. Those opposite know they are going to lose the next election—we can see it on their faces in the corridors and in question time. Those opposite have a look about them of dead MPs walking. Therefore, they are thinking about what they will do after their political careers are over and I suppose their minds wander to what they can privatise or sell in the meantime.

We have not seen crookery like this since the dark days of the Bob Askin Liberal Government. That is what we are dealing with.

The implications of this privatisation push are profound. If assets such as track, wiring and signal equipment are hived off and service delivery privatised, we can be sure that safety and reliability of the train network will suffer and that the private operator will jack up prices.

Already we have the Opal ticketing system run by a private company. People cannot buy a ticket at most railway stations, prices are jacked up every year and a private company skims profits off the top. It is no way to run a public transport system.

I reiterate: Labor opposes this privatisation push. We will fight back against the privatisation agenda being put forward by this shonky Government.

This is bad legislation being put forward by a bad government.

Earlier in the debate, the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure sat here listening to the contribution of Labor members, occasionally raising points of order and generally having a good time.

I note he has made himself scarce now that I am in the Chamber. That is because he refuses to face me and he refuses to answer to his myriad failures as a Minister.

This attempt to carve up our transport system is an admission of another failure.

Lately I have been giving the Minister a hard time and he does not have the guts to come into the Chamber and debate me on the details of his portfolio.

This is a Minister who said recently that in 10 years' time he did not think government would be providing a public transport system.

The solution to the Minister's incompetence and the solution to his disinterest in and antipathy for public service is not to sell it off. The solution to the Liberal Party's philosophical opposition to public service and public transport is not to privatise it.

The solution is to get rid of the Liberals, elect a Labor government and let the grown-ups fix the mess that has been left for us after six miserable years of this Liberal Government.

By the time the Liberals are done it will have been eight years of crooked Cayman Island deals, eight years of incompetence and eight years of failure.

Perhaps the greatest failure of this incompetent Minister is his decision to buy a new train for the Blue Mountains that does not fit the tracks.

My community in the Blue Mountains relies on efficient, reliable and safe public transport; it is integral to our day-to-day lives and to the local economy. But this Government cannot deliver efficiency, reliability or safety. Instead, the Government is buying trains from South Korea which do not fit the tracks and will not squeeze through the narrow tunnels out to Lithgow. It beggars belief.

But, of course, when the Government privatises the transport system, the narrow tracks and tunnels requiring costly upgrades will remain a State Government liability while the service delivery is handed over to the private sector. Once again, the taxpayers cop the costs while the private sector runs off with the revenue-generating side of the business. This is the most crooked of deals.

Let us call this for what it is: the legalised theft of public assets by the New South Wales Berejiklian Government. The Government has no mandate for these privatisations, none whatsoever.

I reiterate that Labor opposes this bill, we oppose the privatisation of public transport and public assets, and we hold very grave fears for what will be left in the public estate for New South Wales when we return to government.

There are two long years left to go before the next election and the parliamentary burglars opposite are trying to knock off everything they can between now and 2019.