

FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

Bowen moves on prosecutions

By ROSS DUNN

CANBERRA: The Attorney-General, Mr Bowen, plans to introduce urgent legislation today to allow a number of prosecutions to proceed, including criminal charges against Dr Geoffrey Edelsten.

Edelsten is facing charges of conspiring with the missing under-world figure Christopher Dale Flannery to assault a former patient, Mr Stephen Evans, between January 1 and April 30, 1984, and of conspiring with Flannery and others between January 1 and February 29, 1984, to pervert the course of justice.

The matter is up for mention again on December 15.

The prosecution case is primarily based on the tender of cassette tapes of two telephone conversations intercepted by scanners. Although illegally intercepted, there is legal precedent for them to be accepted as evidence at the discretion of the court.

Under changes to the Telecommunications Interceptions Act, the Government intends to remove this discretion in future cases.

However, the Government had proposed in its original bill a section to ensure that proceedings currently before the court, such as

the Edelsten case, were not affected.

This section was knocked out in the Senate through the combined opposition of the Coalition parties, who claimed it was retrospective, and the Australian Democrats.

Mr Bowen will reintroduce this section of the bill today, banking on Opposition support because of the threatened court cases.

Mr Bowen told Parliament yesterday it was clear that the bill, as originally proposed, "would have allowed the prosecutions to continue".

"They are in jeopardy now," he said.

The Government had not proclaimed the Act because it wanted the prosecutions to proceed.

The Coalition parties agreed this week to support in principle changes to the telephone interception bill.

At the same time, the shadow Attorney-General, Mr Reith, claims the Opposition's policy on the legislation has not changed.

The Opposition believed that the admissibility of telephone tap material, illegal or not, should be left to the court's discretion.

He said the Government wanted the Opposition to "agree to a bill which ensures that illegally obtained information which has been obtained in the past will be admissible under the Common Law whilst illegally obtained information obtained in the future will be not be admissible".

"This is a classic case of the Government wanting to have its cake and eat it too," Mr Reith said.

"It is happy to see illegally obtained information to prosecute certain pending actions but it would bar such material in future cases."

Govt accused of rigging flight monopoly

By ROSS DUNN

The Opposition accused the Federal Government yesterday of creating a monopoly for Ansett Airlines and Thomas Nationwide Transport Ltd (TNT) on flights to and from Christmas Island.

Such claims pose special political difficulties for the Government as the chief executive of TNT and managing director of Ansett, Sir Peter Abeles, is a close friend of the Prime Minister.

During Question Time yesterday, a Liberal backbencher, Mr Ken Aldred (Vic), called on the Government to acknowledge its use of air route regulations to create a monopoly for the companies on flights to Christmas Island.

The Minister for Land Transport, Mr Duncan, replied that the regulations were not new and the Government had merely complied with them.

But speaking outside Parliament, Mr Aldred said he had not been attacking the regulations but the way they had been used to create a monopoly "by specifying the BAe 146 as the only aircraft able to service Christmas Island".

"Only Ansett/TNT operate BAe 146 aircraft in Australia and that will remain the case for the foreseeable future," he said.

Mr Aldred said the monopoly was also giving the companies "a backdoor opening into international passenger aviation".

In the Senate, the Minister for Transport, Senator Evans, denied that the Government had been overprotective of Qantas and that this had led to the current squeeze on flights into Australia.

He said the Government was bound to observe international agreements on flights and was taking action to cope with an unprecedented rise in demand.

"In addition to the 137 supplementary flights that have already been announced, Qantas will be leasing a 747 aircraft for six weeks from mid-December," he said.

The extra aircraft plus further scheduling meant Qantas would be operating more than 20 extra flights, he said.



Mr Tuckey ... no Medicare.

User-pays health is Tuckey's new hope

By PILITA CLARK

CANBERRA: The Opposition spokesman on health, Mr Wilson Tuckey, is looking at new policy options to create a radically different free-enterprise, user-pays medical care system.

He wants everyone to be privately insured, hospitals to operate on full cost recovery and only welfare recipients to be compulsorily insured.

Mr Tuckey stressed yesterday that the revised policy work was still very much at a preliminary stage. It could be altered altogether if the costings he is having done are not satisfactory.

But he is clearly in favour of a system which would include:

- The complete abolition of Medicare.
- Public hospitals being run as businesses by independent boards, which would charge fees to balance operating costs.
- The abandonment of the community rating principle in favour of age-related risk management for health funds. This would require elderly people to pay higher premiums which would be subsidised by the government.
- A significantly deregulated health insurance industry.

Under an age-related risk management system of health insurance, aged people would pay more than younger, healthier people. So a pensioner could end up paying about twice as much as a 21-year-old.

Mr Tuckey said this was far

The senator woos owls of laughter

By ROSS DUNN

The mating habits of the boobook owl are a serious matter, deadly serious for the last female boobook owl extant on Norfolk Island.

So why was the Senate hooting hilariously yesterday at every word of the Minister for Environment, Senator Richardson?

The Minister informed the Senate that "to rectify this problem and to make our lone female a little happier", the Government had imported two New Zealand male boobook owls.

"One might wonder why the importation of New Zealanders would make anyone happy," he said. (Hoots).

It had become obvious that the arrival of the two immigrants had excited not only professional bird-watchers but most residents of Norfolk Island as well, he said.

Interested volunteers were "crawling all over the bush of Norfolk Island trying to determine whether an event of substance has taken place".

Senator Richardson said the Government had hoped for a whirlwind courtship followed by "unmistakable signs" of a "traditional happy event".

But so far "most of the activity appears to be oral", he reported. (More hoots).

"Lest I be accused of language unbecoming, might I say that most of it has been vocal," he said. "Very often, of course, New Zealanders are all talk and on this occasion there has been much calling." (Even more hoots).

The Government was not so much interested in the calling as the answers.

Government rules on privatising Telecom

By STEVE BURRELL

CANBERRA: The Government yesterday ruled out the privatisation of Telecom and Australia Post as it announced a move to commercialise business enterprises and statutory authorities.



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