

Bus contracts

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) (12:35)—My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. After last week's bus rally, Minister, your government wrote to regional bus owners stating that you will not be taking country bus owners' assets at the end of their new contracts. Minister, if you are prepared to backflip and acknowledge that it is utterly unfair to take the assets of country bus owners, why does it remain your policy to seize the assets of city bus owners at the end of their new contracts?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER—Order! Members will come to order. Order! The member for Macedon has already been warned.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) (12:36)—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Clearly the Leader of the Opposition was not listening to the response I gave to the Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party last week, otherwise he would not have repeated the wrong information he has just provided to the house on the metropolitan bus contracting arrangements.

And if the Leader of the Opposition would like a briefing on metropolitan bus contracting, I would be delighted to give it to him and provide information also as to how the opposition, when they were in government and had the chance to make changes to bus contracting arrangements, brought in an operator and proceeded to cut funding and cut routes to the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne. I am happy to

provide further information to the Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition in his question also asked about regional bus operators, and on that point he is correct. There has been a letter that has been sent to regional bus operators. There are around 1400 regional bus operators, and the budget provided around \$5 million for the contracts under which the regional bus operators operate to be continued on their current basis. That was communicated very clearly last week following the budget, and it was felt important to communicate that message to regional bus operators because the Liberal Party and the National Party have simply been lying to them.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Attorney-General and the member for Warrandyte!

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) (12:38)—The letter last week to country bus operators claims that city bus operators do not have a good track record of collaborating with the state government. The Sita family has operated Kastoria Bus Lines in the north-west of Melbourne for more than 50 years. Owner Dom Sita is facing the loss of two generations' of family assets if he signs a contract to continue to do the work his family has done since the 1960s. Minister, are you prepared to meet Dom Sita at his Westmeadows depot to explain to him and to his staff why you believe they do not have a good track record of working with the government despite him having served his community for more than 50 years?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) (12:39)—I am delighted to meet with anyone within the confines of the probity requirements under which the bus contracts—probity, I know, does not mean much to the Leader of the Opposition. We know that. We know about kitchen table deals. Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER—Order! I warn the member for Frankston.

Mr Guy—On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, the minister was asked a very clear question about whether she would actually go to explain her decision to Dom Sita and his staff at his Westmeadows depot—some of the staff who will lose their jobs under her reforms. If she is not interested in standing up for these people's jobs, maybe she should

say so or she should just sit down and stop being a complete disgrace.

The SPEAKER—Order! There is no point of order.

Ms ALLAN—I answered the question directly at the outset when I indicated to the Leader of the Opposition—I know he is more interested in the sound of his own voice than others—that—

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER (12:40)—Order! The member for Kew will leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour. Honourable member for Kew withdrew from chamber.

Ms ALLAN—I did indicate that I am happy within the confines of the appropriate probity arrangements to meet with anyone to correct the lies and the misinformation that is being peddled by the Liberal Party and the National Party to bus operators in metropolitan and regional Victoria. I am happy to do that because they are simply wrong. We are proud to support a bus industry, particularly with over \$110 million in additional funding for bus routes across Victoria.

Ministers statements: road infrastructure projects

Mr PALLAS (Treasurer) (12:41)—It gives me great pleasure to rise to update the house about the Victorian government's last Victorian budget delivering significant investments to reduce congestion. They are investments that are made possible by our strong economy and of course our AAA-rated economy. Our economy leads the nation. Our jobs growth leads the nation. In fact one in 10 jobs in the economy today did not exist more than three and a half years ago. Indeed nearly \$1 of every \$7 in the Victorian economy—the GSP of the state—did not exist three and a half years ago. That is what growth looks like.

For the past three and a half years we have been getting things done, including providing \$110 million to get the north-east link ready to go to market. Infrastructure Victoria describes the north-east link as 'the priority road project'. The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry calls the project the missing piece of Victoria's transport puzzle. And of course RACV describes it as their top priority.

How bad it must feel then that the Leader of the Opposition has been so clearly out-positioned and

undermined by the Prime Minister only days after he made his captain's pick to abandon this vital project and instead focus on a zombie road that does not stack up. We have already had one referendum on the east-west link. Victorians know exactly what happened when the member for Malvern tried to blackmail Victorians with his shameful side letter. I do not know what makes the Leader of the Opposition think they will support it when it comes at the expense of this most urgently needed road. So I cannot wait. If they want a regurgitation of the last vote on east-west, then—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer has concluded his statement.

Bus contracts

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (12:43)—My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. The five and seven-year contracts you are offering to city bus operators contain clauses that state, 'New buses procured in that term, non-managerial staff and intellectual property will be transferred to the government at the end of the contract term.' Last Tuesday you said that compulsory acquisition of bus operators' assets was not happening. Now your contract options show clearly that it is. Minister, why did you lie to bus operators, and why did you deliberately mislead the house?

The SPEAKER—Order! That question contains an allegation which cannot be made other than by means of a substantive motion. I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to rephrase his question.

Mr HODGETT—My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. The five and seven-year contracts you are offering to city bus operators contain clauses that state, 'New buses procured in that term, non-managerial staff and intellectual property will be transferred to the government at the end of the contract term.' Last Tuesday you said that compulsory acquisition of bus operators' assets was not happening; now your contract options show clearly that it is. Minister, why did you make false and misleading statements to bus operators, and why did you deliberately mislead the house?

The SPEAKER—Order! For the guidance of the member concerned, it is the last phrase in his question—'misleading the house'—that is problematic. I will, for the last time, provide the deputy leader with the opportunity to rephrase his question. Allegations—

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Malvern on a point of order—

Mr M. O'Brien—On a point of order, Speaker, my understanding of standing orders rulings from the Chair is that it may be unparliamentary to allege that a member has deliberately misled the house but it is not unparliamentary to say that a member has misled the house.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Malvern is correct, but I think the question did suggest that the minister had deliberately misled the house, which is inappropriate.

Mr HODGETT—In the interests of time I will just repeat the last sentence, Speaker. Minister, why did you lie to bus operators and why did you mislead the house?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) (12:46)—I thank the deputy leader for his question. The two allegations he has made are wrong—incorrect—and I will repeat the offer I made earlier to the Leader of the Opposition: if he would like a briefing on these matters to stop his campaign of lies and information, I would be delighted to come and brief the opposition on the facts of this matter.

Supplementary question

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (12:47)—Last Tuesday you told the house that any claims of compulsory acquisition of bus assets were completely wrong. However, on 28 February this year John Berger, the secretary of the Transport Workers Union (TWU), wrote a letter to your government pointing out that you are breaking an election commitment to an entire industry and to passengers by demanding that bus owners agree to the acquisition of their assets at the expiry of the next contract they sign. Minister, who is lying: the Transport Workers Union or you?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) (12:48)—In answering the question I am happy to inform the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that I had a meeting with John Berger from the TWU, and we had a very good conversation—

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN—I am telling you about it, so it is clearly not secret. I had a meeting with John Berger from the TWU. We had a really good conversation, and it was an opportunity to provide John and his colleagues with information—factual information—about the metropolitan bus contracting arrangements. In

that meeting the key concern of the TWU was that they did not want to see any repetition of the contract that was signed with Transdev by those opposite. They did not want to see any repetition of that lowering of contractual standards. I gave them the assurance—and it is reflected in the negotiations that are going on right now—that we have no intention of repeating that grave error made by those opposite.