



Speech by

Hon. PAUL LUCAS MP

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

Hansard 14 November 1996

FIRST SPEECH

Mr LUCAS (Lytton) (5.58 p.m.): Let me say at the outset how proud and honoured I am to represent the men and women of Lytton in this House. In particular, I thank them for electing me as a parliamentary member of that great reforming institution, the Australian Labor Party.

The Lytton by-election campaign ran over a period of five months, giving me a unique opportunity to meet personally many of the thousands of decent, hardworking men and women of the electorate. Many years ago, Kim Beazley Snr lamented the loss of the cream of the working class from Labor activism. I must respectfully disagree and say that it was my experience in the Lytton by-election that the working men and women of the electorate remained committed to the election of a Labor member and the progressive policies of Labor in Government. I can only say that both before the by-election and since I have never ceased to be delighted at the warmth and hospitality of the people of the bayside—the pensioners, the families, the battlers and the kids.

Besides my family and my faith, the other great institutional influence in my life has been my membership of the Australian Labor Party. I joined the Labor Party at 18, shortly after Bill Hayden's loss of the 1980 Federal election, and have since that time been nourished by the rich tapestry of the membership and policy dynamism of Australia's one great lasting political party. Throughout the history of this nation and this State, it has been Labor that has been at the cutting edge of change and innovation to improve the lot of the ordinary man and woman.

Let me record at the outset my commitment to the principles of unionism and the need for collective action by the weak and powerless to ensure a fair go and their just share for the fruit of their labours. The labour movement of the 1890s saw the need for it to participate in the parliamentary process to achieve the real gains it needed for a better society. In the 1990s, with increasing numbers of members in Parliament, like myself, being educated through university and no longer from the shop floor, it is vital that Labor maintains and strengthens its links with the trade union movement. It is the union base that distinguishes Labor from many of the world's other left-of-centre parties and ensures that our policies are based on egalitarianism and respect for the individual worth of all, rather than some paternalistic, good-natured gesture. If three words could sum up what I believe Labor stands for, it is "a fair go". I commit myself as a member of Parliament to fight for a fair go for the people of Lytton and the people of Queensland.

Some people in life are fortunate to have a privileged upbringing. I, on the other hand, am privileged to have had a modest upbringing where my parents taught me the values of honesty, hard work and respect for others. I thank my parents, Trish and Col, and my sister Anne, for their love and sacrifices that they made for me over the years. I also thank my now deceased maternal grandparents, Norah and Tim Lee, for giving me their love of their faith, and my paternal grandparents, Tom and Pat Lucas, for their unswerving loyalty to Labor through the good times and the bad.

It is indeed a very great privilege to be chosen to represent the people by following in the footsteps of such a great member of Parliament as Tom Burns. Tom Burns is to me the quintessential Labor politician—a man always prepared to fight for the little people and the battlers, whether they be in the electorate of Lytton, in public housing or the bush. When campaigning in the by-election, person after person came up to me and told me what a great member Tom Burns had been, many telling me stories of how he had helped them in a way that always preserved their dignity and respect.

Tom Burns has represented the electorate of Lytton for the entire 24 years since its creation, and I am acutely aware of the very big shoes that I have to fill in representing his old electorate in this Parliament. Both Tom and Angela have been great teachers, and I place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation for their help and encouragement both before and since my election to this Parliament.

When Tom Burns made his maiden speech before this House on 12 September 1972, he gave his special thanks and appreciation to his campaign director, Darcy O'Dempsey. When Tom Burns retired, he was the father of the House. Darcy O'Dempsey outlasted Tom and also served as my campaign director. Darcy was Tom's campaign director for every single one of those 24 years. This must make Darcy O'Dempsey the father of all campaign directors. Darcy has not only been the driving force behind Labor campaigning in the Lytton area, but also for many years he has ensured that we, from the Labor branches in Lytton, have helped other branches of the party less fortunate than us in carrying the Labor banner during campaigns and on polling days.

I also wish to thank my loyal and hardworking band of campaign workers and volunteers for their commitment and support. Whether it be people who staffed the office day after day, like Barbara Colledge, or our life members, Harry Ballment, Lil Blinco, Topsy Chiverall and Arch Geary, who have been fighting the good fight since long before I was alive. These hardworking volunteers never get a cent for their effort, but the satisfaction and pride of having a Labor representative for them and their fellow bayside residents.

I also thank State Secretary of the ALP, Mike Kaiser, for his support and advice. Mike is not only a personal friend, but someone whose political skills and advice, so amply demonstrated in the Lytton by-election campaign, that I have absolute faith and confidence in.

Of all the people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude, no debt owed is as great as that one that is owed to my wife, Sharon. Sharon, I thank you for the love, support and encouragement that you have given me, not only since we have been married, but in the 13 years that we have known each other. I also thank you for being a fantastic mother to our four children, Tom, Matt, Michael and Monica. Many people, both inside the political process and out, have warned me of the sacrifices that a politician's family must make in the course of his or her career. To you I say that I will strive to ensure that I never forget my fundamental obligation to my family.

As a practising but very imperfect member of my own religious denomination, I feel that it is important that I say a few words about the influence of religion in politics. Religious belief is an important but not a determinative factor in one's moral and ethical make-up. I reject those who claim moral or political superiority on the basis of their religious practice. I would hope that all of us, religious or not, realise our fundamental obligation to work for the improvement of the lot of the lives of our fellow men and women, regardless of their race, colour or creed. To paraphrase those words so eloquently recalled by Edmond Campion—

"Mr Smith went to Church.
He did it every Sunday.
Mr Smith went to hell.
For what he did on Monday."

Neville Wran, when once asked what the main priorities of his Government were, said, "Jobs, jobs, and more jobs". I could not agree more. There is nothing more dignifying than to give someone the opportunity to earn a living and to give him or her the pride of getting a pay packet and saying, "This is mine, I earned it, I will spend it on my spouse and family."

Just as the Federal Liberal/National Government wishes to remove the statutory commitment of the Reserve Bank to maintenance of full employment, so has this State National/Liberal Government pursued policies that have already had the effect of increasing unemployment. During the period of the Goss Labor Government from 1989 to 1996, Queensland's labour force grew by 202,000—some 202,000 additional Queenslanders being given the dignity of a job. Queensland, with 18 per cent of Australia's population, was responsible for 23.5 per cent of the increase in the labour force.

Under Labor, we had a Government that delivered on projects and brought jobs to Queensland. Labor secured the \$800m expansion of the Comalco smelter at Gladstone, resulting in significant value-adding benefits for the State and the country. Labor developed, in an integrated way, the Carpentaria/Mount Isa mineral province, with initiatives such as Government sponsored research and coordination of infrastructure, land use and environment planning. What has the coalition delivered? A freeze in capital works, policy paralysis and, at 10.1 per cent, the highest unemployment of any mainland State.

But Labor does not only have a commitment to the working men and women of Queensland. There are many proud achievements of State Labor in Government for those no longer in the work force. Lytton has many older people amongst its residents. These people have benefited from

initiatives such as the Senior's Card and the Home Assist and Home Secure programs. Home Assist and Home Secure, operated in Lytton by the fine people of the Wynnum Blue Nursing Service, have helped many pensioners to have that extra security and the right to feel safe in their own homes.

One area crying out for reform of the law is that relating to coronial inquests. The Goss Government had started the process of reviewing the Coroner's Act and had announced the laudable intention to create an Office of State Coroner. As a practising solicitor, I was astonished at the shocking injustices perpetrated time after time by inadequate coronial investigations and hearings. The families of people tragically killed, whether by suspicious acts or gross negligence, are owed, at the very least, a proper and thorough investigation of the events leading to their loved one's death. The community also deserves a proper and thorough investigation, with a view to implementing changes in the law or systems of work to prevent such deaths or injuries from occurring in the future.

One has to look only at the pain and hurt suffered by the family of Mount Isa school girl, Peta Ann Devine, who had to endure three inquests to have her death properly investigated. I can also recall an inquest involving a death at the Brisbane Watch-house where the entire police staff, one by one, claimed, and were allowed, the privilege against self-incrimination and did not answer any further questions after they were asked the initial question: were they on the staff roster on the night of the death?

I believe we need to overhaul our coronial system along the lines of that operating in Victoria. In that State, the primary role of a coroner is not to decide who will be charged with a criminal offence—that is the role of the Director of Public Prosecutions. The coroner's role should be to look at why the death occurred and to recommend action to prevent any recurrence in the future. To get to the bottom of the events, the coroner must have the power to fully take all the evidence, instead of allowing the blanket claim of privilege against self-incrimination.

Very serious consideration should be given to providing that the Coroner's Act, like the Criminal Justice Act and the Corporations Law, require that no incriminating answer shall be admissible in criminal proceedings, but require it to be answered in the inquest to allow the coroner to base his or her findings on all the evidence that is potentially available and come to a fair dinkum conclusion.

There are many working men and women in Lytton who, in recent years, have had to undergo massive change and dislocation in the name of workplace reform. The legal profession and the courts should be no different. I pledge myself to supporting initiatives to make our judicial system accessible, prompt and inexpensive. If it is good enough for a wharfie to be assessed by container movements, then it is reasonable to ask judges to ensure their courts operate in an efficient manner. The very important doctrine of judicial independence does not include independence from prompt obedience to the rule of law.

If I was given the choice of an electorate in Queensland that I would most wish to represent, then there is no doubt that I would choose the electorate of Lytton. The people of Wynnum, Manly and Lota are blessed by living adjacent to the beautiful Moreton Bay. One of the greatest strengths of the electorate of Lytton is its very strong community of interest. We have Moreton Bay on our eastern boundary providing recreation and enjoyment for young and old, and on the western boundary we have a green belt, though sadly decreasing, which helps us preserve our character as a local community which grew from the days of old Wynnum town.

I am sure that very few members of this place would be fortunate enough to have their electorates serviced by the multitude of community and service organisations that exist in Lytton, all working together to keep the bayside the best place to live—a place where young and old, the workers and the retired, work, live and play together.

A classic example of the sort of commitment shown by our local community-spirited people is that of Mrs Nell Fletcher and her organisation, ARAD, the Aid and Recreational Association for the Disabled. For 27 years, ARAD and its band of volunteers have worked tirelessly, and without Government funding, to provide support, assistance and respite for physically and intellectually disabled people and their families. ARAD is but one of the countless community organisations that devote their time, work and love to making the bayside a better and fairer place to live for the whole community.

Adjoining a delicate marine ecosystem, the people of Lytton are acutely aware of the need to care for their environment, not only for now but for our children and their successors. Tom Burns was a great fighter for the bay. It was successive conservative Governments that were responsible for allowing coral dredging to occur on a large scale in Moreton Bay. I am proud of Labor's achievement in saving Green Island from dredging and negotiating with Queensland Cement and Lime to relocate to Gladstone by 1998. But that is not far enough. Having inspected Mud Island and seen the damage done by coral dredging, I believe that coral dredging should be banned immediately in the environmental interests of the bay.

Labor also has a proud record in declaring Moreton Bay one of Queensland's first two RAMSAR sites and declaring Moreton Bay a marine park. I call on the current Government to finalise the zoning plan in order to maximise protection for the bay.

Being adjacent to such a large city, and including a growing port complex, it is vital that we maximise the environmental protection for the bay. Every encouragement should be given to port industries to conduct themselves in a fashion that allows people, the environment and industry all to grow and prosper for the future. I said before that the greatest priority of a Labor Government should be jobs. I am concerned to ensure that the people of Lytton get their fair slice of jobs and business, particularly from the port area. I commend Ampol for both its community consultation initiatives and its attempts to source, as far as possible, a number of its supplies from the local community.

The Commonwealth Government promoted growth in suburban areas by locating the Australian Taxation Office in Chermside and Mount Gravatt. The State Government should play a similar role, particularly in encouraging bodies such as the Port of Brisbane Corporation and the Department of Environment to locate their offices in Wynnum, thus taking advantage of our excellent public transport links, skilled work force and the reduction of pollution and congestion resulting from inner-city concentration. This would also result in significant financial savings in reduced rent and overheads.

Finally, let me record my commitment to our State and nation's future—its youth. Being a parent of four young children, I am acutely aware of the benefits and responsibilities of living in a society where decency, honesty and tolerance have been practised for many years. Our country is all the better for its ethnic diversity and our common goals as Australians. Whether it be presenting awards at a school speech night to children from a non-European background, cheering our local girl Vicki Wilson, the Australian netball captain, or barracking for Cathy Freeman in the Olympic Games, the sum of our individual parts adds up to make the whole of our nation the greatest and most tolerant country on earth.

Lytton has always been an area that has been all the better for the interaction between children, young families and the more mature members of the community. Whilst served by many excellent local sporting clubs, it is my belief that we do have a lack of local activities for our young to participate in. We have excellent organisations, such as BABI—Bayside Adolescent and Boarding Incorporated—which provide support to our youth and play an invaluable role in advocating their cause locally. I intend to pursue projects such as lobbying for the establishment of a playground and recreation association centre to give our kids good, wholesome activities, particularly in holidays. I also intend to pursue my by-election proposal for the extension of Wynnum jetty to make it accessible for fishing in all tides as a particular benefit for those who cannot physically or financially get access to the bay for fishing and other recreation.

In closing, I again thank the people of Lytton for putting their faith and confidence in me and in Labor. I thank them for the warmth of the reception and support given to me and also, during the by-election, to the next Premier, Peter Beattie, and the next Deputy Premier, Jim Elder. In six all but too short years, Labor changed Queensland fundamentally for the better. Throughout the Lytton by-election campaign, one factor constantly was driven home to me. It was the people of the electorate calling out for the return of Labor to Government in this State. I have no doubt that the Beattie/Elder Labor team will be returned to Government by the people of Queensland whenever the people of Queensland are given the opportunity to throw out this paralysed, disorganised rabble that passes itself off as the current Queensland Government.

For whatever such time the people of Lytton choose to have me as their elected representative, I promise to strive in this place to advocate the policies of a fair go for all Queenslanders and, in particular, those in Lytton, regardless of their race, colour or creed.
