



Speech by

Mr ALLAN GRICE, OAM

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

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ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mr GRICE (Broadwater—NPA) (3.38 p.m.): Unlike the previous speaker, I will not be dumping all over One Nation or any other particular group. I would like to say a few things to all the new members of this House. I welcome them all to the House because they are all here for the same reason as us: they were elected by the people. To all the new members I want to make a few observations about some rather disturbing new phenomena in this State and across Australia. I make these observations from the perspective of a member who has served in this Chamber since 1992, who has seen two Governments go and a third installed, and who has seen a fair number of good, decent, hardworking men and women, from both sides of this Chamber, defeated despite their genuine and sincere efforts to serve their constituents and help provide good, stable, sensible Government, according to their individual political aspect.

Members of Parliament are never going to get any sympathy from a public which is always being told that they are lazy, overpaid, awash with taxpayer-funded goodies and generally living the life of Riley. Perhaps this is a matter of discussion for another time, but I refer to the stamp allowance. That allowance covers one mail-out to 14,000 letterboxes per year. One cannot survive in this game on that. Members will find that they will all exceed their electorate allowances, but they will not know that until the end of the first 12 months. They should make their comments then. Members will find that, if they get around their electorates and go to other places to chase information, their car allowance will not be enough, but they will not know that for 12 months. I respectfully advise honourable members to keep those comments until they have had a year in this place so that they can see how much money they do spend. We all stand for office, serve if elected, and stand again in the sometimes futile hope that we will not muster sufficient support despite our sincere hard work. That is the nature of this job, and we all accept it.

Another issue on which I wish to comment is the harboured, strange idea that I have heard expressed on several occasions that we in this place are a bunch of silvertails who belong to some phantom club and we just pass Government between us. If members had done any research, which is very much a part of this job—and I am speaking to all the new members—they would know that this place currently is made up of farm labourers, a motel operator—we all know who he is—a dairy farmer, a footballer, a bus driver, a radio announcer, a journalist and a pastry cook. The pastry cook is me. That was a good job for me. It enabled me to buy my first race car, because I could work two full-time jobs, one during the day driving a truck and another one at night as a pastry cook. That is how I got started.

Mr Pearce: Don't forget the old coalminer.

Mr GRICE: The member is on the list. We also have housewives, a fireman, rail fettlers, policemen, teachers, carpenters, secretaries, a coalminer, a builder's labourer, an unemployed person, a welder, a clerk, electricians, a wharf labourer, ringers, horse breakers—the list goes on. How in the hell could members think that those people are a bunch of silvertails who sit in some sort of phantom club and pass Government backwards and forwards? New members should do their research before they open their mouths.

What concerns me further today is that a strident new element has entered into politics. It is fair enough that opposing sides engage each other in robust debate. I am encouraged that changes to the Standing Orders will help minimise some of the worst abuses of the past. I must add, I suppose, that the appointment of the Government Whip and Deputy Whip has certainly reduced the volume of the

place. They are extremely well behaved these days. However, no rule will ever deodorise this place of the sickening odour of the sanctimonious, holier-than-thou piffle that emanates from some quarters.

There is an obvious belief held by some that they are on some sort of mighty crusade to defend the very fibre and being of western Christian civilisation and that they and they alone represent the will of the people. That sentiment is being expressed across this Chamber more and more. That outlandish, absurd, ludicrous belief is so utterly naive, so completely inane and so totally bizarre that it almost defies belief, but it is here and it is here now. I have listened to more pompous piffle, more truly mind-numbing conspiracy theories and more downright overblown rubbish in my very short time in this particular Parliament than I have in all my years as a member. There are times when I have hovered between laughing and crying, but eventually my action has been, I suppose, a kind of resigned and disbelieving shock. Fortunately, my recuperative powers are strong and my resistance to infection is high, so I am developing some tolerance.

Moral crusades are all very fine and good. Undoubtedly, this State and this nation would benefit from a general tightening up in the morals department, but the hard, demanding and most needed work for an MP is not that of a crusader, not that of some grand political theorist, and not that of some grand pseudo revivalist preacher, but as a fighter for constituents. Some of those members who are freshly sitting in the House may think that they are members of Parliament, but they are not. I say to them, "You will be a member of Parliament when, sitting across from you in your electorate office is a woman who has been bashed, the child in her arms has cigarette burns, her father has been bashed and her mother has been bashed by her de facto. He has legal aid and she cannot get it. When you figure out how to get through the ravines and the hills of bureaucracy and work out how to get legal aid for her instead of that grub—or in addition to that grub—then you will be a member of Parliament, because that is the big part of your job, not this moralistic crusade piffle." And what about the woman who comes in with four or five kids; she has been tipped out of a permanent rent caravan because a mistake was made by the people who count the rent? I say to new members, "When you get her back in there the next day after making accommodation available that night, then you will be a member of Parliament." Those members have a lot to learn, and they would be very smart if they learnt it.

It is a pity that the Minister for The Arts is not in the Chamber, because he would enjoy this analogy, which I like to make from time to time. It was the French Pope Urban II whose speech on 26 November 1095—the member for Ashgrove would probably remember it—inspired the first of several mighty multinational crusades against the infidels. Some crusaders have come in here to this Parliament. They seemed to last forever in the Middle Ages. They were always a good ploy for leaders who felt the need to distract attention from more mundane matters and provide a rallying cry against a distant but nevertheless horribly dangerous foe—as some members seem to think we are. By way of a small historical footnote, I point out that Urban II's feast day is 29 July, which may be better known to some as Mussolini's birthday.

Those who have come into this place under the impression that they and they alone represent the will of the people and that they and they alone honestly represent their constituents, genuinely care about them and can provide all the answers to the bewildering array of problems that beset every member who has ever sat in this place are in for one God-almighty shock. In fact, I venture to say that their sense of shock in the real world of the electorate office will probably be even greater than mine was when I listened with dazzled disbelief to some recent speeches that I could only politely describe as unique.

Every member of the Chamber, irrespective of his or her political persuasion, is entitled to the honest respect of other members. None of us has all the answers. It is really good enough if, in some fashion, we can collectively come up with the answers. The eyes of Queensland are on this Parliament. The eyes of Australia are on this Parliament and, indeed, through the media, the world is watching us as it never has before. So my plea to every member here is not to resort to cloud-cuckoo-land conspiracy theories about secret laws being drawn up in unnamed foreign capitals as the basis for a speech, but rather to use our time constructively to debate legislation, to represent the interests of those who elected us, to expose wrongdoing and to just serve the people as we have been doing for a long time in here.
