



Speech by

Mr B. LITTLEPROUD

MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs— NPA) (10.29 p.m.): I stand once again in this House representing the people of Western Downs. I am aware of the make-up of this House. I welcome all those people who are new to it and I remind all members that, in fact, democracy has had its chance. It put us into the Parliament in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We all now have the responsibility to try to give some stability to Queensland. Hence, today we are debating this motion of confidence which was moved by the Premier, to which three amendments have been moved. I oppose the motion of confidence and I will speak on matters relevant to Western Downs.

First of all, I think it is important that we recap the strategy of the Borbidge Government. We worked out the things that were needed for Queensland. We needed to reduce the impact of Government on business right across Queensland. We needed to return all the services such as the DPI, the courthouses and whatever else had been run down, especially in rural Queensland. If we were going to make the State grow, there was a desperate need to develop infrastructure: water, ports and coal. We needed to attract large business, and the previous speaker, the member for Burnett, touched on all the things we did to achieve that. As he pointed out, the results were quite tremendous. We were at the threshold of good things. Big things were happening in Queensland. Added to that, of course, was the tight financial management of the coalition; we had rescued the various State accounts from some pretty perilous situations.

So I was interested today to listen to the Premier during the debate on this motion of confidence—and I took note—when he said that he had met with business leaders soon after coming to Government, I think within two days. He said, "There will be no freeze on public works." I thought immediately of the inquiries I have made since the election into matters relating to Western Downs. I made inquiries into the building of the Institute of TAFE on the Darling Downs. An annex to the Chinchilla State High School associated with the Toowoomba TAFE was to be opened in January 1999. The last word I had about 10 days ago was that nothing can happen until the State Budget is brought down. I do not think it is possible now to go ahead with that project and have it operational by January 1999. The people of Chinchilla had this proposal put to them in 1989 when we were in Government; it was in the planning stages. We have been waiting for 10 years, and now I find that it is at risk.

Similarly, in 1989 we were promised a TAFE college in Dalby, which was to open in 1991. It was not proceeded with. Only in the last two years, under the Borbidge Government, was a specially designed TAFE building granted to become operational later in 1999. The same inquiries I have made show that the capital works program associated with it is at risk. Two weirs in the electorate of Western Downs put together by the previous Minister for Natural Resources, the member for Warrego—the Nangram weir and the Condamine weir—are going to bring surety to those people who could use the water and bring new inputs in terms of horticulture and agriculture into the area as well as added cash flow through the communities of Chinchilla and Miles. The replies to inquiries that I have made at the department's Toowoomba office recently are to the effect that nothing is assured until such time as the new Beattie Government considers these matters in its Budget. I certainly hope that it sees the worth of these projects.

The Premier also made promises today about employment—jobs. It is interesting because, on the very first day of the State campaign, he said, "We will get unemployment down to 5%." I

immediately thought of Bob Hawke when he said, "No child will live in poverty by the year 2000", or whenever it was. It rated about the same. So this morning I once again took note of the Governor's Speech. There was not one mention of 5% unemployment; that has been dropped. I listened to the Premier today. He was talking about getting unemployment down and about jobs; he has dropped any mention of the 5%. It has all gone out the door.

A moment ago my colleague the member for Burnett was talking about what we inherited when we came to Government. The ALP inherited from the Ahern and Cooper Governments a very prosperous State with low unemployment. By the time Labor members had finished with it in six years, the growth was 2.2% and unemployment had jumped by 60%—from something like 8% up to about 12%, I believe.

Mr Slack: Yes.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: The member for Burnett pointed out that, in just two short years we had cranked up State growth to in excess of 4%—we almost doubled the rate of growth in Queensland. I ask honourable members: with those sorts of projects at risk, bearing in mind the sort of performances we saw under the Goss Government only two years ago and also bearing in mind how it stifled growth, how can I as the member for Western Downs express confidence on behalf of the people in Western Downs? I cannot possibly support a motion of confidence in the Beattie Government.

I turn now to the Deputy Premier, who has been talking up all the things he is going to do in terms of State development. I looked at the Courier-Mail on Tuesday this week. I noticed that he was speaking about the Chevron gas pipeline. He has commented that it is going to be the highest priority in terms of State development for this Government. He said—

"It's not just a gas pipeline"—

this is Chevron—

"It is probably the lifeblood for all those communities that have been struggling with very high unemployment rates between the far north and Gladstone."

That is pretty honourable sort of stuff, I suppose, but I am thinking in terms of Western Downs. I am thinking in terms of what we are going to do for our people.

Further on in the article he went on to say that he was reluctant to give total support to the scheme—that is the Surat Basin in my electorate—until the companies involved complete their feasibility studies. That is fair enough. So we will wait until the feasibility studies are over, but it is quite clear that in his own mind, as the member for Burnett said a minute ago, the No. 1 thing for this Government is Chevron without regard for those people who have put in all the money, without regard for all the studies that have been done and without regard for the needs of my people. He talks about it being "probably the lifeblood of those communities that have been struggling". By hell, they are struggling out my way.

I remind honourable members of the contribution made by the new member for Callide, which was an excellent speech. He pointed out exactly the needs of people in rural Queensland. My constituents face exactly the same problems. For generations we have had hundreds of millions of tonnes of coal lying idle. Only something like 4% or 5% of the water capacity of the Condamine Basin within my electorate is used. The rest of it is going to waste. All at once in a couple of years we get all those things bundled together—all those things can happen—yet I find comments such as these coming from the Deputy Premier. How can I be expected to support a motion of confidence in the Government when it comes up with this sort of performance and it talks down the sorts of things for which we have been crying out for years?

Mr Lucas: You were elected on our preferences.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: About 6%. That is about a 4,000 vote margin. That is all right.

Mr Lucas: You wouldn't be here without our preferences.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: But I am still here.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mickel): Order! The member for Lytton!

Mr LITTLEPROUD: I turn now to another Minister, the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. Mention was made before by the member for Crows Nest about the initiative of the previous Government with regard to the new correctional facilities that are going to be needed in Queensland. As a Cabinet, we accepted a proposal put forward by the member for Crows Nest. We thought that it was best for regional Queensland—an area of Queensland, especially south-east Queensland desperately in need of some sort of new cash flow—to consider injecting some State Government money not in one place, but possibly three places in south-east Queensland to try to overcome some of that population drift.

I was listening quite intently when the Minister for Police and Corrective Services was interviewed on the radio. He had been talking to the councillors of the Roma Town Council. Other people were ringing in on talkback radio and they were asking him, "What are you going to do?" He said, "I can assure the people of Queensland that I will be giving the taxpayers the best value for their dollars." Honourable members can read into that, of course, that he is going to go for one 600-bed prison rather than three 200-bed prisons. He can go out and defend his assertion that that is the best value for the dollar for the people of Queensland, but it is not. Other things have to be taken into consideration.

I can understand that the Minister is worried about his own departmental budget and how he is going to do it all and get the best value he can for the department, but the decision is bigger than that. We have a rural area that is suffering a population drift. We need new cash flow to get away from the dependence on agricultural products that the Deputy Premier spoke about earlier today. The Beattie Government should have put a stop to it and said, "These people had foresight; they had wisdom. They realised what needed to be done. Bring some new industry out there. Bring some new Government services out there. Inject some new money into the place."

But the Minister for Police and Correctives Services said he is going to review all those plans. I certainly hope that he listens to the comments that have been made in the Chamber today because we believe that there is a desperate need to take some of this Government money out into those areas that are starving. If we do not put that sort of money into those areas, we are going to be spending money on the relocation of people from those parts of Queensland back into the cities where infrastructure is so much harder and more expensive to put in place. So how can I, as the member for Western Downs, which under the Borbidge Government had the possibility of getting a prison facility at Roma, ever support a motion of confidence in this Government? How can I be expected to go back to the people of Western Downs and say that I stood up and backed the Beattie Government because it looked like it was going to give us some sort of stability—the stability of going backwards.

The next Minister whom I want to talk about is the new Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources. I have had a fair bit of experience of fixing up messes over the past couple of years. About two or three days after I became the Minister for the Environment, the new licensing and compliance provisions of the Environmental Protection Act were going to be proclaimed. They would have meant licences for 15,000 individual businesses across Queensland. Local government was in uproar and business was in uproar. In two years I have been able to wind that back so that something like 2,500 businesses will not be paying an annual licence fee. I was congratulated by the Metal Trades Industry Association of Australia and various other industry groups who said, "At least there is some sense, some sanity, coming into it. You are being responsible and you are being sane." Now that we have the correct policy we find that the Labor Government is going to set up an Environmental Protection Agency. We have to substitute the word "agency" for "authority". I want to ask this question—a question which will be asked when the Budget is brought down: how are we going to get the funds for this Environmental Protection Agency? What part of the Budget that goes to the Department of Environment is going to be transferred to fund a new bureaucracy? Is it going to be at the expense of the clean air strategy for south-east Queensland? Is it going to be at the expense of the endangered species unit? All new administration costs money.

One of the things I have noticed in my 15 years in this House, which covers one six-year term of a Labor Government, is that Labor is great on plans and ideologies, but when it comes to administration and making things work we find that Labor does not work. It is a bit like the Whitlam days. There were all sorts of big ideas but they did not work. I will bet that the people in industry are going to find that, whereas we were reducing the impact of Government on business, they will now be up for new licence fees. If money is not taken from the budget for the Department of Environment we will find that Labor will increase the licence fees. During the election campaign the new Minister also announced that there is going to be a Commissioner for Sustainability. It sounds good. Everyone has been using the word "sustainability" for the past couple of years. We know what it is all about. If a Government is worth its salt it does not need a commissioner to go around and tap people on the shoulder and come back with the ticks and the crosses on a check list. If a Government is good enough it will have been out communicating with the public and taking advice from professionals in its own departments. A responsible Government would know what is sustainable.

Oh no, it is not good enough for the Beattie Government. This Government is going to have a new commissioner. How can I, the person who represents the struggling small businessmen on the Western Downs, support a motion of confidence in a Government that is going to restore the very things I spent two years getting rid of? I was trying to get some relief for small business. How can I be expected to support such a vote of confidence?

The next thing coming forth from the same portfolio is a promise that the area of Queensland held under national parks will increase from 4% to 5%. The former Minister, Pat Comben, made a big name for himself. He is a hero across Queensland because he took the area of national parks from 2% to 4%. He stands up there like a one-liner. He looks pretty good. I will tell honourable members what I

inherited. The Labor Government spent millions of dollars acquiring land but it did not match it with management funds. There was no budget for management. We had feral animals and noxious weeds all over the place. There were places that could not be managed and places where there were no plans. I had just started to overcome what happened when not too much money was spent on the management of national parks. Most of the money went on acquisition. We found that 80% of the budget was going on wages and only 20% on equipment. We had fellows walking around pushing wheelbarrows and driving around in Land Cruisers, but they had no fencing material and no money to conduct surveys. These people were employed to do nothing.

I cranked it back to something like 55% of the total budget was spent on labour and the rest on equipment. Now I find that the Government is going to increase the area of national park in Queensland from 4% to 5%. That represents a 25% increase in acquisitions for national parks in Queensland. I do not think that is very wise at all. Firstly, it is going to cost a hell of a lot of money for the acquisitions. Secondly, do we know that we really need these areas or should we be more selective and pick out only those pieces of biodiversity that are not currently represented in our national parks system? I do not think those opposite have thought about it. It is just a good line. If Pat Comben can go from 2% to 4%, why cannot the new Minister go from 4% to 5%?

I will tell honourable members who has influenced this Government. The Government has been influenced by the Queensland Conservation Council and the conservation lobby. It has been reliably reported to me that, in the days of the Goss Government, the Queensland Conservation Council and a lady called Dr Aila Keto lived in the back of the Minister's office. Those people wrote all the policies and convinced the previous Minister, Molly Robson, that if she put certain things in the people would love her. The Labor Government was not too popular and that Minister did not survive. We have been trying to crank it back ever since. Miss Imogen Zethoven of the Queensland Conservation Council was good enough to say that I was easy to talk to but that I did not seem to take too much notice of her. She was dead right. I listened to her and dismissed what she said because it was a lot of ratbaggery. Now she is back in the door again and she has convinced the new Minister that the area of national park has to be cranked up from 4% to 5%.

The people of Western Downs would reckon I am mad if I give a vote of confidence to the Beattie Government only to see this happen. If it is going to need more money to acquire this extra area, where is the money going to come from in the national parks budget? What will the Government do? Will it let the noxious weeds get out of control? The member for Warrego, the former Minister for Natural Resources, was supplying money to get rid of things such as mother of millions and wild pigs. Those programs will be all gone.

Judging from the performance of the Goss Government of two years ago, and bearing in mind the strategies that Queensland needs and what we put in place over the past couple of years, it is a great tragedy that the people of Queensland made the choice they did and that we find ourselves in this predicament. I totally support the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition, an amendment to the motion put forward by the Premier. I am so concerned about some of the announcements which have already been made with regard to water infrastructure and the coal potential that we have in the Surat Basin that I believe I can go back with confidence and say to the people of Western Downs that we are being sold a pup. We had the dawning of a new age where we could realise our potential, but it has all gone down the tube. What a pity! The One Nation people sitting at the back of the Chamber did not take that into consideration. They did not think about what is going to happen to Queensland. They came in with a small agenda that completely overlooked the reality of where we are going. Now we are faced with a situation where we are expected to give a vote of confidence in the Beattie Government, and I oppose that.
