



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Hansard 6 August 1998

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (5.43 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I support the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply to the Governor's Speech moved by the member for Bundaberg. Firstly, Mr Deputy Speaker, I ask you to pass on my congratulations to Mr Speaker for his election to that high office in this Parliament. Mr Speaker is one of the class of 1989. I have got to know well the member for Redcliffe personally over the past eight and a half years or so that I have been a member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly. I believe he will be fair and will strive to uphold the dignity and the expectations of all members in this place.

The former Speaker, the then member for Nicklin, Neil Turner, did an outstanding job as Speaker. He certainly had my respect and the respect of members on both sides of the House. If there is one thing that I will always remember about Neil Turner, it will be his massive handshake, especially when one has a hand the size of mine. It demoralised me every time I had to shake his hand, but I will always remember him for that.

I also want to congratulate the new members on their election to this Parliament. They have been given a great honour. I can remember the first day that I came in here and how humble I felt about being elected to this very high office. The new members of the Government have been most impressive in the way that they have gone about adjusting to what is a demanding job. Their maiden speeches were full of quality, sincerity and commitment. I know that they impressed many members who sat and listened to those speeches.

One thing is for sure, Labor in Government has a strong and talented backbench to back up what is a strong and talented Ministry led by the Premier, Peter Beattie. The current Ministers deserve to be where they are. They have worked very hard over the time that we were in Opposition, and I feel that every one of them can justify their right to be in the position of Minister. I wish them well over the term; it is not going to be easy. I can assure honourable members that the backbench will be there keeping everybody on the job out there working for our electorates. As I said, it is going to be a difficult task for us in Government. We on this side of the House all know that, but we are determined to work as a team in the best interests of good government for Queensland.

I have no hesitation in acknowledging the Independent member for Nicklin for the courage that he has shown in providing the support necessary for Labor to govern. He has delivered what the public of Queensland expected from elected members in this place, and that is stability of Government so as to allow this State to move on and grow in confidence. We should not underestimate the pressures of being an Independent in a Parliament in which the numbers are so finely balanced. Both Independents—both the member for Nicklin and the member for Gladstone—will play an important role in the processing of legislation. They will have a difficult task over the next three years, and I wish them well.

To One Nation I make the following comments: as individuals, they will have both good and bad qualities—like us all. They have been elected to the Parliament, so like us all they have a job to do. But as far as I am concerned, that is where it ends. I do not like what One Nation stands for. I am being honest about it, and that is all I will say on that subject.

Before moving on to raise issues relevant to the Fitzroy electorate, I want to express my sincere appreciation to the people of Fitzroy for giving me the opportunity to again serve them. This is the third

time I have been elected as the member for that electorate. The first time around I was elected as the member for Broomsound. It was a wonderful feeling on that Saturday evening—election day—to be standing there at 8 p.m. with all my family and members of the party and know that I did not have to go to preferences. While a One Nation candidate stood in the electorate of Fitzroy, she is still out there.

I could not have achieved the outcome in the electorate of Fitzroy if it were not for the support of, first of all—and this has been mentioned in this place on many occasions during this debate—my family. My electorate officer and my support staff have been tremendous and loyal. Of course, I had the support of the Labor Party people. I just could not have done it without the support of those people who believed in me and believed in the party that I stand for. I also could not have done so well if I did not have the support of the CFMEU and other unions in my electorate, and the many friends that I have throughout the electorate on all sides of politics. I can quite proudly stand here and say that I do have very strong close relationships with people in my electorate from both sides of politics.

In the Fitzroy electorate, I see myself as the link between the people and the Government of the day. I was able to prove that in Opposition when, as an active member, I was able to deliver on many things throughout the electorate. That was because of the relationship that I have built with the people and the link that I formed as a local member with the Government of the day. Of course, now that we are in Government, I am in a stronger position to work for my electorate, and I will do so.

One thing that I can say about the attitudes in my electorate is that no problem is too big or too small. I may not always have achieved the desired outcome, but those who seek my help know that I will give it my best shot. I make no promise other than to say that I am committed to the type of representation that the people of my electorate expect and deserve. I keep office hours in 14 different locations throughout my electorate. Some of the new people in this House, particularly those who represent smaller electorates, should realise that in some of the bigger electorates such as Fitzroy it is not a matter of sitting in the office or jumping in the car and spending 10 minutes in driving around the electorate. It takes me five hours to drive from the top end to the bottom end of my electorate. I do not know what it would take to drive across electorates such as Cook, Mount Isa or Charters Towers. We have to take into account the size of the State and that we have electorates which cover large areas.

How many honourable members can claim to have 16 coalmines, 14 communities, 2 million head of cattle, grain, cotton and other important primary industries in their electorates? These industries are all important to Queensland and Australia.

Mr Seeney: You need a bigger allowance.

Mr PEARCE: I do fine. I have the reputation that I am prepared to travel to all corners of my electorate to meet people, to attend functions and, most importantly, to be accessible and responsible. I have demonstrated that, regardless of which party is in Government, I will stand up and fight to defend the people of my electorate and deliver what I believe is a fair and reasonable outcome.

Mr Roberts interjected.

Mr PEARCE: I do not think that the Santa Clause we have here now is in the race of competing with me. At least I wear shoes. The temptation for a Government which is uncertain about what lies ahead is to cut back on capital works. That is an easy way out. The view is to put a hold on capital works until we see what dollars we have on hand. All honourable members will remember that when the coalition took office in 1996 it did exactly that. Treasury imposed a six months capital works freeze. That decision marked the beginning of a loss of confidence in the State and has resulted in a downturn in the economy. This has impacted on jobs and on the direction that the State has taken.

The Labor Government has opted to get on with the job and is proceeding with much of the coalition's capital works program. This Government is aimed at boosting employment and rebuilding confidence in the State's economy, which will in turn encourage people to spend money. When people are spending money the tills are turning over, small business is functioning and we have the opportunity for more employment.

Several members on the other side of the House have cast doubt on the Government's ability to deliver on the 5% unemployment figure which was mentioned by the now Premier during the election campaign. No-one on this side of the House expects that that 5% target will be easy to achieve. Factors which will have to be taken into consideration include the Asian financial crisis, low commodity prices, oversupply in exports such as coal and population growth through people moving to Queensland from southern States.

Experience gained by Governments of either persuasion in recent years has indicated that jobs created for Queenslanders can be negated by people moving to this State looking for work. We have to be sensible when we look at the statistics for the number of jobs created. We can create a lot of jobs, but if we have a mass movement of people into the State from the south those percentages can be negated. We have to be very careful about how we sell the number of jobs that we create in this State.

I know that the Premier and his Ministry are working on Budget figures in order to make a great indentation on the 5% target. The Labor Party has set a target on jobs. We have a jobs agenda. I would rather have a jobs agenda than have no commitment to jobs at all. We must have a commitment to those hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders who simply want to work.

I am concerned that in my electorate we are losing so many jobs in the coal industry. Every time we lose a job in the coal industry it has a multiplier effect right across central Queensland. It always amuses me when a new coalmine is opened and we hear mine owners and Government talking about the creation of hundreds or thousands of jobs not only at the new mine but across the region. However, when there are cutbacks in the mining industry we do not hear the mine owners or the Government talking about the multiplier effect that this will have across the region. The impact of the loss of jobs in central Queensland is just being recognised. People in Rockhampton, Bowen, Gladstone and Mackay are now starting to feel the impact because the tills are not turning over and the dollars are not going through the businesses. The economy is at a standstill.

Coalminers throughout Australia have continued to pay a high price for the current international market oversupply and the resultant reduced prices. Thousands of jobs have been lost. All honourable members need to understand that it is the families and the communities who pay the ultimate price for the haphazard operations of mining companies. It has been a difficult time for mineworkers in the present climate because employers and the conservative Federal Government are hell-bent on destroying unionism and attacking workers' rights and conditions.

No-one is more aware of this than I am because I spent 11 and a half years in the coal industry and I have seen the industry change. Coal companies have lost all compassion and respect for the people who have made Australia a leading coal producer. Mine operators used to care about the workers and paid attention to their needs, but today the worker in the coal industry—and in other industries in this State—is nothing more than a number on a computer. That is to the detriment of our State and our nation.

I want to deal with a few issues in my electorate. I will not have enough time to touch on all the issues but I will start with a few. I wish the Police Minister was in the House because I would like to put on record——

Mr Mackenroth: He's listening to it on the monitor, actually.

Mr PEARCE: I thought he might be since he knew that I was on my feet. I would like to record my personal thanks to the Minister and the Police Service for acknowledging the need for a police presence in the community of Gracemere. The recent announcement by the Minister of the provision of a police station and two police officers at Gracemere has been applauded by the community. We have lobbied for five years for a police presence at Gracemere. In the short term we would have accepted a Police Beat program where a police officer worked from a private home. The Minister looked at the cost of establishing a Police Beat and compared it with the cost of putting a police station at Gracemere. He has made the correct decision. I welcome it. The people of Gracemere welcome it. This police presence has been badly needed. That police presence will be in place by June next year. This action gives the community of Gracemere its own identity. No longer will the people of Gracemere have to rely on the services of the Rockhampton police. Whilst the Rockhampton police have done a tremendous job in servicing Gracemere, the people of Gracemere will now feel a lot safer as a result of having that police presence.

As a member representing a large rural constituency I often raise issues that impact upon rural producers and the small isolated communities that support local industries. It has been said on many occasions in this place that rural communities are disadvantaged by their size and isolation. They lack access to the community services and facilities that urban Australians take for granted. There has been plenty of rhetoric on the need to stop population drift from the bush to the more populated urban centres, but there has been little evidence to suggest that the rhetoric has been turned into action.

I am of the opinion that the future of rural Australia is fundamentally in the hands of those who live there. The challenge for Government is to find ways of delivering a better quality of life through jobs and industry growth so as to provide a good reason for people to want to go and live in rural Queensland. There is a need for communities to take control of their own destiny. I say without any disrespect to the people in rural communities across Queensland that we have to stop blaming politicians for the problems suffered by rural people. People living in rural Australia need to step forward and use the expertise and determination that exists in their communities to do what the politicians have failed to do. This can be done through strong local leadership, and by bringing the human strengths of a community together to identify local assets and set goals. From this a sense of ownership will develop, and initiatives will emerge and be driven by enthusiasm and commitment.
