



Speech by

JOHN KINGSTON

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

Hansard 16 September 1998

PUBLIC SERVICE AMENDMENT BILL

Dr KINGSTON (Maryborough—ONP) (4.44 p.m.): Madam Deputy Speaker, firstly, may I congratulate the Speaker on his election to office. Because of my respect and concern for the Speaker, I have measured sound levels at three sites. The respective decibel levels were 45 in a company boardroom, 50 in a party room and frequently over 75 in this hallowed Chamber. Science tells us that speech is easily misunderstood when the level is over 60. There is danger of hearing impairment from noise levels above 80. Thus, I suggest that decorum is the healthy way to go.

I congratulate all members, newly elected and re-elected. I look forward to working with all members in a constructive manner for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

There are people I wish to thank. I first thank the voters of the Maryborough electorate for placing their faith and trust in me. I hereby undertake to pursue their individual and collective interests to the best of my ability. I also thank all the people, many of whom I had not known before, who worked so generously to see that I was elected, particularly John Francis. Thirdly, I thank my wife, who is a Lao national, an Asian who has suffered compound misfortunes—firstly, to marry me and, secondly, to learn that I was going to stand for One Nation, that party of racists according to some of the media. Unfortunately, some colleagues on the left of this House appear to have been convinced. Or hopefully they are only grandstanding politically, establishing their personal footprint on this Parliament.

Within the rapidly developing science of environmental economics, the term "footprint" is used to define the quantity of resources a community consumes. If politically motivated words concerning the racist qualities of One Nation members are considered a resource, then I suggest that it has been overutilised. It is time to get on with what we were all sent here to do: working together efficiently and effectively in the interests of our constituents and our State.

I dedicate this, my first speech in this House, to my wife and to my electorate of Maryborough. I am intensely proud of them both. I reiterate my intention to work for their combined futures.

My wife's name is Pahninh. Her nickname is Joy, which in the Lao language means "thin". I tell the honourable member for Southport that Joy weighs 35 kilos—maybe 38 wringing wet. Joy had the intestinal fortitude, which in her case is obviously not proportional to girth, to accept my electoral decision; to stand with me publicly, despite her natural shyness; to host the media interviewers who invaded our lives—and here I must pause to say that those who took the time to meet us on equal terms were very courteous and some have become good friends, and I thank them for that—to suffer the pain of rejection from four previously dear but intolerant friends; and to be proud and a little nervous to be a Lao Australian involved in a movement which has the interests of all Australian people at heart. Given Joy's history, what I sought of her when I decided to run for election was a huge ask and I can only thank her for her faith in me and yet again admire her courage.

Joy's experience in Laos has given her an appreciation of what can happen to a country when extremist groups run rampant. It is ironic that the schoolchildren who were encouraged to demonstrate outside this building against perceived racism frightened Joy, an Asian. In her experience, when a mob makes that much noise there are injuries.

I would like to tell the House a little about Laos and life there as Joy knew it. This may explain why the majority of Asian immigrants work so hard to become responsible, self-supporting members of the Australian community.

Joy and I met while I was working with the Lao Government trying to assist the people of Laos to progress towards a better future by formulating their national five-year plan. I also owned and

operated a private college which grew very quickly and now has 800 students within a communist country. Our early life together was busy and it has stayed that way, especially lately.

Under the Lao communist centralised economy the production of food for the Government and its employees was the responsibility of State-owned enterprises, many or most of which failed to achieve their production targets. With great respect, and with no thoughts of comparison, as I look around I record that there were few men of girth in the Lao Government.

The Communist Party, which still holds ultimate power in Laos, stated in a 1989 report that it had achieved many successes and a few mistakes but it had discovered that the way to true communism was through capitalism. Thus I became one of a team to develop Government policies and strategies to achieve revival through the encouragement of capitalism and very, very carefully screened foreign investment.

I hasten to add that the peasant farmers, who make up over 80% of the Lao population, have never ceased practising capitalism within their internalised subsistence economy. But, as in all nations, private enterprise cannot flourish unless the Government creates the environment in which it can operate securely—a fact our Australian Government seems to be forgetting.

At this stage I have to pay sincere tribute to the majority of the current Lao Government officers, many of whom are now listed amongst my best friends. I have never seen people so dedicated to the recovery of their country despite past atrocities, despite decimated and scattered families, and despite being paid salaries which are insufficient to allow them to support their own families. I now regard Laos as my second home. What I say today I say out of concern. I have a great and lasting regard for the Lao people. But what happened in Laos should be a warning to us. The Lao people were unhappy with the state of their nation. There were only 30,000 members of the Communist Party when they took control of the Lao community of four million people. Recent economic and environmental profiles of certain countries do not recommend the communist economic doctrine.

Joy was born at the wrong time to be born in Laos. She has endured over 20 years of internal revolution and war. She went from being a middle class aspiring medical student to a peasant farmer/political refugee hiding in the mountainous jungles. She carried 200 litres of water over four kilometres daily to ferment coffee to eke out a subsistence living for her family.

During the Vietnam war—a war in which Laos was not officially involved—four million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos—one ton of bombs per resident. Worse, these bombs were usually full of "bombies"—anti-personnel weapons—just enough to blow a limb off. I have worked in villages where every resident is an amputee—all being trained to make prostheses for other unfortunates. I can assure honourable members that that is a very sobering experience. I was asked to visit one area where the villagers became ill after entering a particular area of jungle. I found textbook symptoms of mustard gas exposure. In other villages I found symptoms of even more serious agents.

Joy's father was an officer in the French army—an undesirable CV during a revolution of independence. Instructed by their father, Joy's brothers paid dearly to escape to Thailand and thence to the United State of America. That left Joy—the whole 35 kilos of her—to support her aging and demoralised parents, her chronically sick sister, her niece, and eventually her own two children. Joy worked as a secretary, she worked in a foreign-owned garment sweatshop on piecework and she worked as a trader. Eventually she settled into private enterprise, weaving traditional fabrics. By weaving 12 hours a day, seven days a week, she and her extended family survived.

Now that I have the chance to answer, uninterrupted, the question asked by a zealous reporter concerning whether Joy can be a successful Australian, I emphatically say yes. Why? Because Joy has survived more hardship and more responsibility than anyone I know. She has maintained her independence, her ability to love, her ability to trust, her ability to be a true and tolerant friend, her delightful sense of humour and her eagerness—in fact compulsion—to work. She currently operates an expanding business and, heaven forbid, she wants to start another.

Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I warn all members of this House that should you visit us—and you are welcome to do so—please do not sit still in Joy's garden. Should you do that, you will be uprooted and trashed. Some of my favourite plants have hesitated and perished. I would not wish that on members of this House. Joy remains proud to be Lao—as she should—but she is proud and grateful to be Australian. She sees a working future for our family in this great country. But she and I have some concerns about the pathways down which our country appears to be travelling.

I would like to speak about the Maryborough electorate. Firstly, I want to say that my Asian wife and my Aboriginal secretary have always been totally accepted and treated with respect and courtesy. They are, as they should be, just two Australians working within the Maryborough community.

Secondly, I wish to record my gratitude to some true Australians. Not long after returning home, when I was unwillingly in this city in hospital following some overly enthusiastic tractor driving, our neighbours at that time—professional fishermen and farmers—cared for Joy and our daughter, Anouson, as though they were their own family. They did not think about it; they just did it. Such

behaviour is natural to them. I ask: is Maryborough different from other Queensland rural electorates? No, I do not think so. Again I ask: is this the type of reassurance that the Premier delivered in Hong Kong? My experience in 12 Asian and Pacific countries has taught me that Asians develop trust in individuals from their actions, not rhetoric. Only from trust does trade develop.

I would like to concentrate on Maryborough, the multiskilled electorate which I am so proud to represent. I would like to dwell on the history of Maryborough but time is inadequate. Why history? Because history is the warp and the weft of the fabric of the future community. It is the crucible in which the durability of community foundations are forged. Let me assure honourable members that the Maryborough electorate may be a little battered, having been disadvantaged by an apparently uncaring Government—until last weekend when the Premier listened to Maryborough and I thank him for that—but the foundations are still solid and the community fabric is still strong. Our problems with the unacceptable behaviour which appear to be endemic in Australia are small by comparison.

Maryborough's history was such that the resulting home-made fabric was closely woven on solid foundations of quality timber, steel, clay and primary production. The strength of the Wide Bay district still is its diversity and its extraordinary variety of skilled artisans.

In 1842, Andrew Petrie and Henry Stuart Russell found the Mary River and recognised that it had the potential to be the second port so badly needed in Queensland. Pastoral development was already taking place in the hinterland. In June 1847, George Furber advertised in the Moreton Bay Courier that he was about to establish a wool store on the south bank of the Mary River. His schooner Sister soon departed with 65 bales of wool.

What is happening in the Maryborough electorate today? Diversification and a plethora of home-grown skills remain the strength and potential of the Maryborough electorate, but there is now evidence of a growing lack of confidence. We have the highest deposits in savings accounts in Australia. I repeat: the role of Government is to create the environment in which private enterprise can have confidence. Such an environment will entice those saved dollars to flow into productive businesses. This Government's perceived threat to downgrade the base hospital may have been the unifying force needed to raise my fellow citizens' passions for success.

Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I invite members to examine the current policies of the Dutch Government. It has realised that future economic growth and an increase in employment will flow from small business. It is actively encouraging Dutch small business with effective strategies. I also invite members to read Ivana Bottini's article titled Europe's Economic Lesson, which appeared in the Courier-Mail on 2 December 1997. She reported that—

"Governments in Europe interfere, intervene and regulate; there is a very clear sense that Governments have a huge positive role to play in the regulation and promotion of the economy."

She continued—

"... that the EC has seen the most successful case of controlled long term economic growth in the world."

In the meantime, businesses in my electorate are told that they have to become yet more efficient to face increasing opposition from multinationals on the lonely level playing field. As a result, we see our multiskilled residents underutilised.

I would briefly like to mention only a few of Maryborough's current successes. Firstly, I refer to Walkers, which is the third-biggest employer in the Maryborough electorate, with 400 to 600 skilled employees. Walkers started in 1868. It built the first Australian steam-driven locomotive in 1873. It went on to build more steam locos than any other works in the Commonwealth. Later, it built diesel electric and diesel hydraulics. Currently, Walkers and Adtrans have manufactured the first narrow-gauge tilt train in the southern hemisphere. With a can-do attitude, they have built sugarmills, cast one-piece propellers for the US Navy and recently built the CNC-controlled gantry miller. Up to 50% of their production is exported, currently to 19 countries.

The timber industry started in 1861 with the formation of the union sawmill. The piles used to build the East End docks in London came from Fraser Island, and they are still there. Hyne & Son started in 1882. Now it has 35 operations along the east coast and 800 employees. Its Tuan pine mill is the most modern in the Pacific rim. Its laminating plant produced the 100-metre-long beams for the year 2000 Olympic dome. Its current trials with eucalyptus plantings indicate beneficial economic and environmental impacts.

W. Olds & Sons is the company which, for me, crystallises the strength and the problem of the Maryborough electorate. It has 16 permanent employees and 16 shareholders. They are very innovative, but very, very modest when talking about their achievements. They have many patents. They make special rotating hospital beds, stirrups and headlight fixtures for Queensland and national rail locos. If a metal product is hard to make, ask Olds.

Maryborough has a designer who designs and makes ocean-going yachts in panels; a world-renowned sail maker; a low-energy portable refrigerator exporter; a simple slipway with a compound turnover of over \$1m; a unique aluminium boat exporter; a drug education group with the most authoritative web site; and so on. I could continue, but I think I have made my point.

The Maryborough electorate is multiskilled and innovative. For this reason, I was delighted to hear of the appointment of the Deputy Premier as the Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade. I assure the Minister that the Maryborough electorate is well equipped to become his first epicentre of rural community development. We have the foundations, we have the skilled personnel and we have the will. All we need is the economic environment, and this Government has the opportunity to create that. I say to the Minister: give us, the people of Maryborough, the encouraging signals, and our heavy industries, our light industries, our canefarmers, our graziers and all our diversified industries will work like hell to help you achieve your electoral promises. Thank you.
