



Speech by
Mr. R. CONNOR

MEMBER FOR NERANG

Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr CONNOR (Nerang—LP) (7.30 p.m.): Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your elevation to that high office. I am sure you will do a very good job. In debating this motion of confidence in the Government, we must ask: does the Labor Party deserve our confidence? Before answering that question, we need to examine whether the ALP reflects what the electorate wants. What was the message the electorate was sending to the Parliament? Let us consider the actual numerical election results. Labor won back all the seats that the Liberal Party won from them in 1995. One Nation won 11 seats: five from the National Party and six from the ALP. One new Independent won a seat from the National Party. From the ALP's perspective, it is the status quo. Of course, the real gain was made by the One Nation members and the Independent, who took six seats from both sides of politics.

During the election, the regular, recurring theme behind much of the message that was being sent to us was economic rationalism. However, I will discuss "political rationalism". Economic rationalism is similar to economic liberalism. I am not talking about laissez-faire economics. Economic liberalism goes back to the turn of the century. It was about competition and productivity. It was not a "let them eat cake" philosophy. It was not survival of the fittest. It was about competition and productivity. If one wanted to have a job or to be in the marketplace, one had to be competitive. If one was not competitive, one was not in the marketplace. If one was not productive, one was not in the marketplace. According to that model, one was paid according to one's productivity.

Mr Fouras: That's why the Liberal Party has got nine seats—you don't know what is happening out there.

Mr CONNOR: Yes, I do: competition and productivity.

I remind this Parliament that it was the Labor Party that brought in economic rationalism about 15 years ago. Before that, Australia had the settlement model. That was all about entitlement and position. That model goes back almost to the settlement. According to that model, everyone in society in Australia was entitled to a certain remuneration according to where one was in the system. One received a basic wage plus increments above that depending on one's skill or position in society. That is opposed to the economic rationalism model, which is all about competition and productivity.

I coined the term "political rationalism". How should we define political rationalism? It is similar to economic rationalism. It is in the style of laissez-faire economics. It is all about competition and productivity plus, perhaps, a bit of survival of the fittest. The results of the Queensland election suggest that the message being sent to us by the Queensland electorate was this: "If you continue to give us economic rationalism as you have for the last 15 years, we will give you political rationalism." From the perspective of economic rationalism and political rationalism, let us consider what some of the commentators and others have had to say about the election. The day before the election, the Courier-Mail published an article written by Mr David Oldfield—from the One Nation Party, of course. The article headed "Doing it Pauline's way" states—

"Why should you vote for One Nation?

The alternative question should also be put—why would you vote for National, Liberal or Labor again?"

That is the issue that we are currently debating: why should we vote for Labor again? He went on to say—

"The front page of one of Australia's biggest metropolitan newspapers on October 20, 1997, showed Australian business and Governments retrenched 3.3 million full-time workers in the past 12 years in a massive downsizing of the nation's workplace and that more than one in two full-time jobs have disappeared in just over a decade."

I repeat: one in two full-time jobs has disappeared in just over a decade. He went on to say—

"Australia is being transformed—from a nation of prosperous full-timers into impoverished part-timers.

Twenty years and more of laissez-faire economics has done savage and perhaps irreparable damage to Australia."

If that is right—and I am not saying that it is—and if the electorate expects the same to apply to the political system, the electorate would be saying, "We'll sack about half of you and put you on the economic scrap heap. If we do not scrap you, you will be put there on conditions." Of the 89 members in this Chamber, 25 are new. If that one-in-two approach is coming, there are still a few of us who might be in trouble. Perhaps what the electorate is saying is this: "We want those members who are left to have a savage cut in their pay and conditions."

Perhaps the electorate is quite simply sending us the message that they do not like the policies that both sides of politics are giving them. On election day, in an article in the Courier-Mail headed "The jolts the elites needed", Lawrie Kavanagh made the following quite interesting comments—

"The important thing on this day of a most historic election is that the rise of Hansonism has already achieved benefits for the average voter ... it has frightened the living daylights out of the academics, bureaucracy's Sir Humphreys and those major-party politicians who picture themselves just as much born-to-rule and stuff-the-workers as did the overlords of last century."

He went on—

"Do today's alarmed academics, bureaucrats and politicians know the cause of what they see as dangerous levels of support for Hanson's party? Probably not; it may be too close to home since it is mostly of their making. For their benefit, it's like this: A lot of Hanson support comes from disillusioned average Australians who have witnessed the dismantling of this nation's traditional family values to a point where enlightened crackpots set community standards which would be unacceptable in a pig sty."

Mr Kavanagh went on—

"Come down and have a look, you mugs."

He was referring to us. He went on—

"You might try explaining about economic rationalism, globalism, the big picture and all the other pathetic academic waffle we've come to expect from major-party politicians.

It's the sort of elitist buffoonery that might look good on the drawing board up in the ivory tower, but it translates into joblessness, hopelessness, tears and torment at street level."

That is what Mr Kavanagh had to say on election day before we knew the result. I might add that these were ALP policies put in place 15 years ago. In case members think that Lawrie Kavanagh is on his own when he makes these sorts of comments, they might like to listen to another Courier-Mail article that summed up the situation after the election. This article was not written by Lawrie Kavanagh; it was written by Terry O'Connor and Gordon Collie. On 27 June, two weeks after the election, under the heading "The disenchanted" they had this to say—

"What used to be seen as a slow, sad but inevitable decline in rural economies has turned into a gallop, courtesy of economic rationalism, globalisation, privatisation, the march of technology and, perhaps worst of all, indifference and ignorance.

Governments centralise regional services so that a few country towns benefit and the rest suffer; banks decide that decades of service to, and profit from, a small town count for nothing and close the local branch; primary producers find themselves battling 'dirt cheap' imports from countries intent on dumping their surpluses."

That is what two journalists from the Courier-Mail had to say a couple of weeks after the election. However, I would not limit their comments to rural communities; this feeling existed throughout Queensland. Why is it that One Nation can get around 30% of the primary vote and, I might add, win seats in places such as Ipswich, Logan and Waterford? This issue is not a rural or a regional issue; it is a Queensland-wide issue.

What is the message? I believe that the people of Queensland are saying to us, "If you continue to give us economic rationalism, we will give you political rationalism." I believe that what they mean by "political rationalism" is this: "We will give you politicians 15 years of unrelenting instability. We do not care what side you are on. We have no party allegiance. We will throw you out on the economic scrap heap with no notice, the same as you have done to us. We want productivity, we want payment and conditions for politicians based on work, not entitlements, like the old settlement model. You have no security and you have no tenure. We will have no loyalty to your brand"—meaning political party—"and we will consume cheap imports like you have forced on our society." They are saying, "We will give you political rationalism." Then again, maybe they are saying something else. But one thing that they are not saying is that they wanted Labor back.
