



Speech by

Mr RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (2.43 p.m.): I acknowledge the previous speaker, the member for Nicklin, in his new role. It is certainly going to be a difficult role for that member of Parliament. I do not think that members would disagree with a lot of the things he said. However, everything depends on what happens in the next few weeks and months. Most people who come into this place for the first time come in with high ideals. I believe that every parliamentarian—on this side of the Chamber or that side of the Chamber—comes into this place with the right ideals. If that were not the case, I doubt very much that the people would have elected them in the first place and they would not be here.

So I pay a tribute to all parliamentary representatives. I certainly believe that on many occasions they have been persecuted. Quite often it is very difficult for members to send out the decent, good message. So I wish the member for Nicklin well. I have no doubt that, today, he will send out his decent message. I sincerely hope that that continues into the future. I wish the same for every other parliamentarian in this place. However, in the same breath, I also say to members, "Do not kid yourselves", because I know only too well that there are people out there who are only too willing and ready to denigrate us and put us down. It is very hard for members to constantly pick themselves up when they are constantly put down. I see members on this side of the Chamber and the other side of the Chamber nodding, because that is fact; that is reality. As I said, I wish the member for Nicklin well. I wish everyone in this Chamber well. This is the 49th Parliament. Maybe it can do well. Who knows? I believe that in this State there has been a sea change in politics and that we will see a sea change in Federal politics. I believe that that has come from people in the rural and regional areas of Queensland and other parts of Australia. Who can blame them? Over the years, as the member for Nicklin said, to a certain extent people have been ignored. I believe that there are reasons for that, which we need to look at.

This is nothing new. It is not as though for the past 20-odd years people have been feeling tops and good about everything. I could go back to the Whitlam era when changes were made in relation to moral standards, family breakdown, discipline in the home and discipline in schools. I believe that it started then. That is when I became a little annoyed and a little frustrated. I also know that following Whitlam a fellow called Malcolm Fraser was elected to put it right. He had two massive mandates to put it right and did nothing. So I think that he can be condemned, too. He brought discredit on a lot of representatives throughout the nation. I for one felt——

Mr Borbidge: He knows how to fix everything now.

Mr COOPER: He knows how to fix it all now. It is easy when one leaves politics; one becomes an instant expert. It is while one is in politics that one experiences difficulty and wrestles with problems and issues. We have been doing that and I believe that we will continue to do that. I hope that we all do it with the best of intentions. It has always been the way that people would like things to happen, but they should stick around for a little while and see how the place operates. Then we will see whether Parliament can work. Let us start off the new Parliament in the right way, as we always do, and let us see if we can make it happen. However, I say that the change goes back to those days when Malcolm Fraser was going to put everything right. He was going to restore moral and family values; he was going to bring back discipline into the schools and in the home. Yet he did nothing. I will never forget it as long as I live. I wanted to walk away from politics then.

Mr Purcell: Wasted years.

Mr COOPER: They were wasted years. The member should not forget I have given Gough a bit of a clout, too. I believe that he started it. I believe that is when the rot started. I am going to be fair and ecumenical about this. Let us keep it on track: I believe that was the start of the breakdown, of the disillusionment, of a lot of Australians—a lot of Queenslanders—certainly in rural and regional Australia and Queensland. I was one of those people. I felt very let down.

Then along came Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. Guess what? That is when economic rationalism and political correctness started. As the previous speaker said, the National Competition Policy, political correctness and economic rationalism have caused a massive amount of disillusionment in people, unemployment, and a loss of their sense of ownership and control. A lot of people feel that control has been passed out of their hands. Into whose hands? It certainly has not come into the State politicians' hands. I wish it had because then we could have done something about it. Back then, it was taken out of State politicians' hands because everyone signed off on the NCP. Wayne Goss signed off on the NCP with Paul Keating. Then along came our lot and they ticked it off, too, and said, "What a great idea." All of that came from Canberra. If members opposite want to do something about Canberra, I will be with them—as long as it is a few waves of B52s going over the top. I think that the best thing that we can do is get rid of the place. Members would know that I was asked to run for Federal politics. I said, "Never do I want to go down there. I never want to become like you lot."

Mr Gibbs interjected.

Mr COOPER: I think that the members opposite should be mighty glad that I am here. What has emanated from Canberra has taken control out of State politicians' hands, and that is a tragedy. As representatives, we like to represent people. That is what we are here for. It does not matter whether it is the deregulation of the dairy industry or the pork industry, NCP comes into it. It does not matter who the Federal politician is, he or she says, "We cannot do that. That has been signed off by Hilmer and, therefore, we cannot do anything." I am sick and tired of that. I believe that every single person in this place would be sick and tired of that sort of thing.

I would like to get back some control so that we can make some decisions for the people. Often we see people, such as the pork producers, go down the tube and shoot their pigs. They are told, "This will be good for you." We might help them in five years' time but, meanwhile, they go out of business. Isn't it terrific! That is true. That is exactly what has happened to so many of our industries. I go back as far as the car industry. Once upon a time we could actually build a car. Weren't we terrific! Now we cannot build anything; everything has to be imported from everywhere. Isn't that great! I bet that this once great country that back in 1948 built the first Holden could not even build one today. The industry has gone somewhere else. All I am saying is that these are the sorts of things that cause the frustrations, and it goes to right back to then.

I want to talk a little bit about political correctness. A few members on the other side of the Chamber would love political correctness. Quite frankly, I cannot stand it. I am a keen cricketer. I love cricket. I always called the players "batsmen" and "fieldsmen". I still do and I always will. Do honourable members know what they are called now on good old Aunty, the ABC? They are called "batters" and "fielders". I thought, "Heavens above! Who made the changes?" I do not know. I would love to get a hold of them. I would love to wring their necks, because they made changes and made me say something I do not want to say. So I say, "Hang on. Who is in control? Are they in control, this grey, amorphous mass somewhere out there?" They say, "You must say 'Madam Chair' or 'Chairperson' or 'Chair'." I say "Chairman", and I am going to keep on saying "Chairman" until the day I die. Nobody is going to stop me.

Can honourable members guess what people say now? There used to be "fishermen". Tommy Burns used to love a bit of fishing. He was a fisherman. Now he has to be called a fisher, for heaven's sake, because political correctness said that he had to say so. I bet that he does not, and I hope that he does not, because as far as I am concerned he is a fisherman and that is the way it is going to be.

Believe it or not, this is the frustration we see when we talk to people. I, as well as I think most people in this Chamber, do talk to people. We have not ignored them. Control has been taken away from us in many respects and we do want that control back so that we can help people. I have been into electorate offices in electorates of every different member of Parliament, regardless of what side of politics they are on. They do much the same thing: they represent people. In 99% of the cases I believe that they do help and do their darnedest. It is when control is taken away that worries set in.

I do not blame people for getting angry one little bit. The storm that came towards me was nearly a tidal wave. I feel no bitterness whatsoever, because I feel that those people were so angry because they had lost control. They were going broke, and all of the things that they stood for and lived for had been taken away and they said, "We don't care who you are or what you are. Cop this." And they meant it. All I say is: good luck to them from here on in.

Some candidates certainly got some pretty good publicity out of it. As we know, the Courier-Mail gave them hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of publicity. I guess that I can say good luck to them again. It will not happen every day, I can assure them, because on other sides of politics people have to pay for everything they get and pay through the nose for advertisements.

The campaign just run was very frustrating for a lot of people who wanted to actually release and publish policies. We would try it every day. I have a whole stack of them here. We used to call press conferences and everything. One example is Project Renaissance for the Queensland Police Service, for the rejuvenation and uplifting of the Queensland Police Service. I have a whole resume of things about that initiative. I also have information about initiatives in relation to domestic violence and a domestic violence task force—a brilliant initiative. Other examples are the PC cops program and a prisoners levy to help victims of crime. The list goes on and on.

Guess what? The media did not publish a thing. They were not interested. They were only interested in their own agenda and to hell with policies. But that is what people wanted to hear. People wanted to know what Labor stood for and what we stood for, but the media was not interested. I therefore table this package of information. I also table a letter from my press secretary at the time, who was shocked and stunned that we could go through a campaign with media saying, "There are no policies; no-one is interested", and then going off with their own agenda. That is exactly what happened, and everyone in this Chamber knows it.

New members should not point the finger at all politicians as being the ones at fault. We have tried our damndest to get our message across. They should just see how it is. One day the same will happen to them, but right now they have the limelight. I wish the member for Nicklin well. I wish him all the luck in the world, because he will not have the limelight for too much longer. That is the way it operates, but he has started out well. We all start out well. If he can give us a bit of heart to get right into it again, to do the things that we want to do—that is, represent people—then good on him for that. I welcome all new members into the Chamber.

Mr Gibbs: I thought you said you were not bitter.

Mr COOPER: I am not. I am in a good mood. I have had an interesting run in politics, I believe. I am one of those—I know that the honourable member has been the same, believe it or not—who would have liked some good camaraderie across political boundaries. We should know where we come from. We also know that we all represent people. We all have our jobs to do.

Again, new members will find that it can get a bit nasty in here. That is when they will find the good and the bad that comes out of different people. I leave it to the honourable member for Nicklin, as well as the other members of Parliament, to be the judges.

I mean it when I say that this is a tough job. Every single new member will find that. I wondered what on earth I was doing when I came here in 1983 as a stick picker from Wallumbilla, having loved every bit of it. After about three months of wondering what bells were for, bumping into people, getting vertigo and wishing I was not here, I thought, "This is the strangest game." I also found that there were members of the media then who whistled me over and said, "What went on in the party room today?" I said, "You know I can't tell you that." And they said, "Listen, mate, we can make you or we can break you. Please yourself." Labor members know; the media has done it to them. Not all the bad guys and girls are down in this place. I do think a little bit of honesty like that does not hurt.

I have read with interest the letter Peter Beattie wrote to the member for Nicklin. I have read with interest the response from the member for Nicklin. I do believe that everyone in this Chamber can commit to the sentiments of the letter and should commit to them in this House, not just in the newspaper. That is where the letter has been—it was published—and readers of the Courier-Mail read it and took it at face value. So I say to those in this Chamber: every single person here should be able to commit to everything that was stated in this letter, and that should be done in this Chamber. Otherwise, it falls to the ground. If we cannot commit to it, all the talk about accountability, responsibility, credibility and integrity falls to the ground. Let us commit to that here today and then we will all be fair dinkum and we can all move forward. If anyone does not commit to that letter, then they are not serious. If honourable members support our amendment, everything will be under control.

It has been said by those on the other side of the Chamber how great things were during the previous Labor administration, from 1989 to 1995. I have to say that, from the perspective of this side of the House, they were not. I remember things. I was Premier in 1989 when we were defeated. That defeat came after about 32 years of National/Liberal Government. Of course, there was a lot of euphoria on the Government side of the Chamber—and good luck to them. It was a long time to have been out of Government. When coming into Government, people judge their predecessor's record. I look back over Labor's six years in Government at primary industries and at services to rural Queensland. I look at the closure of courthouses. I look at the closure of railway lines. I look at the gutting of DPI, which had 690 people taken clean out. I look at the tearing down of the social structure of rural Queensland. That is when that particular episode started, and it has taken an enormous amount of effort to try to get it back.

The member for Nicklin mentioned that police were leaving. In two and a quarter years we put hundreds of police back into all police districts. All 27 police districts received extra police. That program is off and running now and we want to keep it going. We will be watching to see what happens under this Government. The coalition Government got massive increases in police budgets, as well as in corrective services budgets. This year alone it has increased by 45% and capital infrastructure has increased by 113%. We will be watching every bit of that.

The coalition was going to construct three 200-cell prisons in three different rural areas from Inglewood, Yarraman, Roma and Maryborough. That was a deliberate attempt to get something going back into rural and regional Queensland. I ask those in Government to recommit to that initiative and show just what they can do. It is amazing what people can do if they have the will. From this year's \$16 billion Budget, 58% was going to rural and regional Queensland. That was putting our money where our mouth is, too. We put so many things back. Services were going back to rural and regional Queensland.

I know that the Minister for Primary Industries has a different attitude from that of previous Primary Industries Ministers of former Labor Governments. I know that Trevor Perrett and Marc Rowell from this side of the Chamber really started to put things back. That is the productive sector we have to look after so much. It is a great employer.

We also need to look at forestry areas so that we can put forestry workers back in where those opposite previously took them out. That is not a good record at all. I want this Labor Government to commit to that. If Labor can commit to those sorts of things—and I will keep them to it all the way through—then things will improve out in the bush. I am happy to help the Minister achieve those things. I have been there, done that and am glad to be back in a position to be able to do something like that.

Mr Palaszczuk: We can work together.

Mr COOPER: Yes, we will give it a go. This is a new era, and we will make sure that we do give it a go.

Recently we have heard some comments mentioned on the radio and in other media. I am referring to the classic claim that we hear from any incoming Government. I point out to the member for Nicklin that that is one thing that we should wipe out. For example, when a new Government comes in it immediately says, "There is a big black hole. There is a \$720m black hole in the Budget." That represents a condemnation of and a slur on all of our Treasury officials—people who are apolitical and who do all of the work down the line in preparing budgets. The Government is saying that all of those people must be crooks. That is not true.

Mr Pearce: He never said that.

Mr COOPER: I have heard that claimed and it is in print. Government members, including Mr Hamill, have said that there is a \$720m black hole.

I will return to the letter that I have been speaking about. All Government members are doing is setting up Queenslanders for increases in taxes and charges. We know that only too well. I notice that paragraph five of the letter states that Labor can deliver its capital and recurrent program without imposing any new taxes or increasing existing taxes and charges above current levels. That letter is signed by Peter Beattie. We will be holding members opposite to that.

The Budget, as we presented it, is perfectly okay. It is heading in the right direction and is very well tailored. The Government should not fool around with it. I know that the Government has to introduce its own programs and priorities, but the Budget should not be altered too much.

I wish to address the Minister for Police's claim regarding new prison officers. He promised 50 officers and said, "That's going to help you." However, we promised 642 officers over the next three years and put in place 650 officers over the past two years. What is 50 officers compared with that number? The Minister's claim just sounds good; the sympathisers in the media get behind it and make it sound terrific.

Let us have a look at the \$1m for security—flak jackets, handcuffs and so on. The Government said that it would provide \$1m, but we budgeted \$22m. That was in our Budget and was funded. We provided \$14m in the previous Budget. The Minister complained about the new Hummers, which are being used to provide security on the prison perimeters to protect our officers. They were put in place because of the massive outbreaks that occurred, supported by firepower from outside the prison. Prison officers were in danger. They deserve nothing other than the best. To protect them and the rest of the community, we gave them the best, and we make no apology for it.

The Government should make sure—and we will be watching—that it sticks to all of its budgets, from primary industries to law and order. If it does not do so, we will tell the world. As I said, we often have great difficulty telling the world about these things. However, we will do our best. I sincerely hope that the member for Nicklin and all of the new One Nation members have a reasonable amount of

success in getting their message through. They have probably already found politics rather disconcerting; one day they support us, but the next day they cut the ground from under us. Members should be ready for that, because that makes our life in this Chamber extraordinarily difficult. Let us not lose faith.

Time expired.
