



Speech by

Mr RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

Hansard 5 August 1998

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mr COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (3.25 p.m.): I join with other members who expressed their loyalty to the Crown. Over the next couple of years it will be very interesting to see which way that goes. However, I will stick with the status quo. I acknowledge the service of the Governor, Peter Arnison, who has been and will continue to be a tremendous asset to the State. I wish him and his wife, Barb, well. I believe the State is in good hands with them at the helm.

I, too, congratulate the Speaker. I could easily congratulate the Deputy Speaker, Mr D'Arcy; but he and I know each other well enough. I wish the Speaker well. I do not say that lightly. The former Speaker, Neil Turner, did a good job. Most people believe that. I thought that he gave the Opposition a terrific run, especially during question time, when I could never be heard. I thought he approached the job in good spirit with a bipartisan approach. I cannot say that about my friend the member for Ashgrove. Upon his election as Speaker, I wished him well, too. But he sent me out of the House time and time again for my trouble. I am very wary about congratulating the Speaker. I will do so, but I will reserve my judgment. I hope that we can have a more bipartisan approach. If things are fair and seen to be so, we will find that the confidence of the House will lift. If that is not the case, if it is one-sided, confidence will fall. We will see how we go. I acknowledge and thank the people of Crows Nest who supported me.

Mr Nuttall: The Labor Party got you over the line.

Mr COOPER: I will come to that. The member should give me a chance. I have only 20 minutes; I want to enjoy it. I have no hard feelings in respect of those who were not able to support me on this occasion. It is the desire of every member of Parliament to represent all of his or her electors. A lot of people need help and, if we can steer them in the right direction and give them the help that they need, we should do so. Most of us do that. Elections can be interesting. The last election was one of the most interesting in which most of us have been involved. I expressed my views on that during the debate on the motion of confidence.

I reiterate my support for the people of Crows Nest. It is a tremendously productive and versatile electorate. It is not far out of town and is one of the nicest places to live in Queensland, of which there are many. The shire councillors are very progressive. They know that they live in changing times. Jean Bray, the Mayor of the Esk Shire, is a good scout and works hard for her area. Geoff Patch is the Mayor of the Crows Nest Shire, which is also a progressive shire. Those representatives work very hard for the people they represent. A lot of those shires are examples for others to follow. At Jondaryan, Peter Taylor is the president of EDROC. That shire has a big future. There is a lot of activity in that area with respect to gas, water and so on. Peter Taylor epitomises what is needed for the future in that part of the world. Noel Strohfeld is the new Mayor of the Rosalie Shire. He has had a lot of experience. The Darling Downs/Brisbane Valley/Lockyer Valley combination makes for a very progressive electorate.

Crows Nest was named because the Aboriginal friend Jimmy Crow used to camp in a hollow tree just out in the middle of the donga. In time the bullock wagons carrying wool and produce coming from the west heading for Brisbane used to pull up in that area. Gradually it became a little camp and then a little village called Crows Nest. It progressed from the little camp to a little village, to the town of Crows Nest, to a Shire of Crows Nest and then to an electorate of Crows Nest. I think Jimmy Crow would

be an extremely proud person today. I sincerely hope that no-one gets it into their mind to try to change the name of that electorate. He has a right to be proud, and we are proud of him.

I thank the campaign committee—the people who worked tirelessly for the cause. Everyone has their cause. The people on the other side of the House have theirs; we have ours. It is often interesting to hear people make their speeches. No doubt those on that side of the House will walk out of here feeling all fuzzy and warm, thinking that they are going to solve the problems of the world. However, they do not have all the answers. Then someone on this side of the House might stand up and do exactly the same thing. I guess somewhere in between someone is right. It should be okay as long as we can keep working in the interests of the people, because the people are ones who are being hurt. They should come first in any case.

As I said, Crows Nest is in a regional part of the State. I guess anything west of Ipswich is rural and regional Queensland. I believe that we did try to look after the people in rural and regional Queensland in the 1998-99 Budget that we brought down. That is the one that members on the other side of the House will now do what they will with it. From that Budget, 58% of the \$16 billion Budget was directed at rural and regional Queensland. That is putting your money where your mouth is. It indicates that help and assistance was needed, and it still is.

I also want to put on the record that in the two and a bit years that we were in Government, about \$220m went into the electorate of Crows Nest in many forms. It was a case of making sure that those people out there did not miss out. Certainly, a lot of that money went to the community groups, sporting groups, recreational groups and so on—right into every little nook and cranny. The small clubs and the small community areas all received a benefit, and I think the people of Crows Nest know that. Most people, of course, would like to do more for those groups in their communities.

As I was saying this morning, primary industries was a wonderful business to be in back in the fifties. However, it has become more and more difficult. More and more farmers have moved out and the drift to the city continues. It started about 30 years ago and it is still continuing. A lot of the people of Brisbane and the other provincial cities have come off the land in the past, so they understand and recognise how difficult it is. As I said this morning, the frustrating part is that back in the fifties it did not matter what industry one was in—it could have been wool, beef, wheat, anything—all that was produced could be sold on the world market and do pretty well with about half of the world population that we have now. Now we have a population of about 7 billion and people are flat out selling anything. That does make it frustrating. It is also difficult from a State and national point of view because, while primary industries—export industries—bring in about \$5.5 billion, they are hard-won dollars that we certainly need to improve the standard of living in this State and this nation; yet it seems to be becoming more and more incredibly difficult.

Now both the dairy and the pork industries have been exposed to what is called National Competition Policy. That policy stemmed out of the Hilmer report. That was ticked off I believe by Hawke and Keating in their times and then ticked off by all political parties over those ensuing years. People thought that that would be the way to go, that in this global world in which we now live we have to have that to get efficiencies and that economic rationalism is going to be good for us. A lot of people are still waiting for that good to occur. Even some of the people who were actually involved in setting up and implementing the Hilmer recommendations are now saying that they did not realise just how out of control it could get. I believe that that has happened. It may have seemed like a good idea at the time to some people, but some people have said——

Mr Hayward: I bet you were cheering when they were kicking the wharfies.

Mr COOPER: My views in that area were totally different to what we are talking about now.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! I ask the honourable member for Crows Nest to address the Chair please.

Mr COOPER: I can. Obviously they are over there. I will talk to you and hope my voice can be heard back over there.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think that would be judicious.

Mr COOPER: I will just direct it all straight to you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I hope that you make sure that every other member of Parliament does that. We all now have to aim ourselves directly in the direction of the Chair; is that it? Is that the rule?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: You are allowed to take an interjection, but it must be through the Chair.

Mr COOPER: I just did. Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, as far as I am concerned, the remarks are——

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I hope that we are not going to have this debate every time.

Mr COOPER: I hope not, too; I would like to get on with it.

As far as I am concerned, those particular remarks are completely out of place. If the member opposite had any intelligence, which obviously he has not, he would know that the whole issue of NCP is something that needs to be addressed by all sides of politics. It is something that was started south of the border by all political parties and I believe that it is something that has gotten out of control. I can see that it is devastating rural and regional Queensland and Australia, and all sides of politics have to bear some responsibility for that. Before it goes on for too long and gets too much more out of control, we are going to see a lot of our people—Queenslanders and Australians—hurt by it.

For those people to say that it is something we have to have because it is going to be good for us, as I said, that is not proving to be so. I cannot see anyone who is actually getting the benefit from it. Therefore, I ask: why do we blindly accept the fact that we must continue to go down this track? For instance, look at the dairy industry. I want to quote from something that Pat Rowley, the President of the Queensland Dairy Organisation, said in some briefing notes to me—

"Finally there is no joy in deregulation for the consumer or the producer. The price of milk in all states where deregulation post the farm gate has occurred has risen strongly e.g. Victoria has moved from \$1.18c/litre to \$1.35c/1.40c unregulated. Little or no price increase to producers but a high margin to supermarkets and processors. Queensland will inevitably follow that trend over the next two years. Under the heavy pressure of NCP we probably cannot reverse the action. However, we should maintain the use of strategic regulation to allow the industry to cope with the unequal commercial pressures."

That is just one industry. The pork industry is also concerned as now we have pork imports coming into this country. Honourable members should not forget that other countries—particularly in Britain and other European countries—have labelling. We in Australia should have labelling—people have been talking about it for years—so that consumers can make up their minds as to whether they want to buy Australian products or not. Labelling should be honest and it should depict exactly where the product comes from so Australians can stick up for Australia in that regard. They have not been able to do it simply because, as usual, someone is dragging their feet on the issue. If we have to have these cold winds of trade and competition coming in to damage our efficient pork farmers—they are probably the most efficient in the world; there are no subsidies at all for them—then we will have to put up with our farmers going out of business.

In those circumstances and if that is the sort of thing that has to happen—and I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that it is not—we have to remember that those people have families. There are also other people associated with those industries, be they vets, produce agents or whoever; it does not matter who they are; a whole heap of people are involved in those particular industries. If that has to happen, a safety net has to be put in place just as there is for other people who are disadvantaged and in trouble. That is why people in the pork industry are so angry, and no-one could possibly blame them.

Some people whom I have mentioned there—Terry Reed, Jim and Margaret Sloane, and Bruce Lockwood—have been of enormous assistance to me in giving me advice on their industry. It is a similar case in the dairy industry with Ivan Vonhoff and Pat Rowley. They have a lot of credibility. They are the sorts of people to whom we can listen with confidence so that people do not have to go back and reinvent the wheel. They can often give assistance to industry where it is needed. To those industries that are doing well, I say that is fine and we thank them for their productivity.

We saw a lot of destruction of rural towns the last time that we had a Labor Government. The railways were closing; the ambulance service was being torn apart; the courthouses were closing down; and the list goes on. That Government took 690 people—extension officers, forestry workers, soil conservation officers, stock inspectors and all of those sorts of people—out of the Primary Industry Department. The bush—rural and regional Queensland—was devastated. It was a case of trying to start to put everything back, which is what we were doing in the past two and a quarter years. To a large extent that occurred. However, that must continue now that Labor is back in Government. I have been talking to some of the people opposite with half a brain—and the member opposite at whom I am looking is not one of them. Some people over there do understand and recognise the damage that was done to those rural towns and their people. It was pointless to devastate them to the extent that they all had to come to the city to try to make a living here. They may as well be out there doing something productive.

Our forests need attention. We should not have all our forestry workers removed. There are important jobs to be undertaken by forestry workers. We also have important jobs to be done in national parks. We can buy up 4% of Queensland for national parks. I think the Government is now going to buy up to 5% of the State for national parks. However, the national parks have to be looked after. It is pointless buying up these areas and leaving them and allowing them to become infested with pigs, dogs, rabbits, cats and other animals. These parks must be managed properly. In that way we will provide good employment opportunities for rangers and forestry workers.

People should not be put back into the Department of Primary Industries just for appearance's sake. Obviously there is a need for water resources people, soil conservation experts and stock inspectors. In the Crows Nest electorate we have a particular problem with the tick line. This is a weak link. The cattle producers in that area are holding the line against the tick, but they are not receiving much assistance. I will continue to fight for those people because the tick can do an enormous amount of damage to the cattle industry in this State. The people in that area are bearing the burden for the entire industry. We must see some fair play in this situation.

I would like to pay tribute to my electorate secretary. We often take the services of these people for granted. They are loyal and effective people and they do a tremendous amount of work in looking after the day-to-day operations in the electorates. They look after people who are in trouble. I am only too pleased to be able to give Sharyn a pat on the back and offer my sincere thanks to her. I also remember the staff of former Ministers. Each Minister has a staff of some 10 people. With 18 Ministers we are looking at something like 180 people. When a Government leaves office these people are cast out into the street. They know the score. That is the risk they take. It is tough on them, all the same. People might spare a thought for them. One of my staff members jumped ship and flew right across the entire political spectrum and landed on the other side before the body was even cold. That was an incredible thing. It shook my staff. Nevertheless, those things happen and someone has to live with it.

I wish to make mention of the home life of parliamentarians. Very few people stick up for parliamentarians. I guess if we do not do it no-one else will. The new members of the House can probably already attest to the fact that it is a seven day a week job. We can work anything up to 15 hours a day. We are not complaining because that is the job. I think most of us enjoy it.

Mr Pearce interjected.

Mr COOPER: At least we might as well stick up for ourselves a bit, knowing full well that one day people will understand. When one is constantly put down one finds that eventually the rule of fair play comes into the equation. If we are genuine about the work we want to do for people we will be recognised. I am not looking for plaudits or pats on the back because I know I will not get them. There is a sense of satisfaction, I think, in knowing that the work we are doing is in the public interest. I do not accept the constant rubbishing that we receive. I do not believe it is entirely deserved. I believe we have a place under the sun where we have a job to do. I believe most members are doing their job to the best of their ability.

I want to say a few words on the portfolio I have just left. I notice that the Minister for Police and Corrective Services, Mr Barton, is in the Chamber. I enjoyed the two and a quarter years I served in that very tough portfolio. The Minister is in a no-win situation. If prisoners escape the Minister is at fault. The new Minister will be at fault now. Drugs are now in jails—they have always been there—but the new Minister will now be to blame. It is an unbelievable situation. I believe we are leaving the new Minister with a pretty good system. We have delivered some good budgets. I do hope that the new Minister keeps the initiatives going. Some of the initiatives need nurturing and cultivating and bringing along. The Minister should not forget that the community is involved. The community is involved in policing partnerships and crime prevention partnerships. The people are playing a role in this portfolio and are enjoying it. They will need guidance and help from time to time. I believe it is worth while to keep those things going.

We made some major changes in the racing industry. I know that the changes we made in all three portfolios, whilst unheralded in the short term, will have great benefits for the people involved in the long term. I thank the Police Commissioner, the police officers and all the departmental people with whom I have worked. They have been faithful and loyal and I wish them well. I wish the Minister well. I hope he will keep these initiatives going because I believe we have left the portfolio in pretty good shape.
