



Speech by

**SHAUN NELSON**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

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Hansard 20 October 1998

### **WATER STORAGE, IRVINEBANK**

**Mr NELSON** (Tablelands—ONP) (11.51 a.m.): Fair and equitable treatment by Government departments is totally necessary for the public to have faith in their system of government. Currently, people have no faith in our system, and one of the reasons is that Government departments are often heavy-handed, unfair and unjust in their decisions. In the Army, we had an RSM who was there, for all intents and purposes, to protect the men from the officers. He was there as a buffer. And trust me; I used him quite often. This system has worked in the Army for centuries and provides not only a buffer for the common soldier but also a buffer for the officers from the soldiers themselves.

I believe that the Minister responsible for a Government department should take on the role of an RSM and act as a buffer between the people and his department. As an elected member—a member who was put there by people in his electorate—he should have some sort of feeling about what the people of Queensland are going through, and he should provide a service to the people of Queensland in interpreting their feelings to the department. He should be there to ensure that citizens are protected from what they perceive to be a cold and sometimes heartless Public Service in their pursuit of economic rationalism.

Today, when giving notice of a motion, I listened to some interjections from Government members to the effect that what I was saying was really damaging stuff. I am not here to damage the Government. I am not here to try to do any underhand and nasty stuff. I am here to get answers for people in my electorate. What I sought today was an answer to a question. As the Minister for Mines and Energy clearly stated, this has been an issue for many, many years—a lot longer than 10 years. No resolution has been obtained by him or by previous Ministers. Both sides of the House are implicated in this. I asked for an answer. I did not come in here to move a motion of no confidence in the Government. I did not come in here screaming and yelling. I asked for some answers, and I asked for some fair treatment.

This is why people are dissatisfied with their Government. This is why the voters of Queensland turned against both parties at the last State election. That is why 1.2 million people in Australia voted against the current party system in this country. The simple fact is that the people are dissatisfied with the lack of accountability. Today the Minister made an outrageous statement that the people are not interested in who is to blame. That is one of the most incredible things that I have heard here today, and I have heard some pretty incredible things. The fact is that the people are interested in who is to blame. The people are seeking answers, and they are seeking those answers because they are hurting directly from the decisions made by Government in the pursuit of economic rationalism. To say that they do not want to know who perpetrated these acts and that they want the situation resolved is partly true. Yes, they want the situation resolved and they want it resolved fairly and justly. That is when I come to another important fact.

Yes, the Government may have a legal leg to stand on in doing what it is doing. I accept that, legally, yes, the Government may have a point—although I would like to see that debated by a QC. But the simple fact is that what the Government is doing is not fair. When people come to my electorate office, I do not ask them where they are from, what they do or anything like that. I listen to their case and I ask myself: is it fair, or is it not fair? And nine times out of 10, the cases that they bring to me are simply not fair. If a citizen of this country cannot expect fair treatment from his or her Government and

cannot expect answers and situations to be resolved in less than 10 years by successive Governments and by different Ministers, then what are we? We are not a Government for the people, of the people, by the people; we are a ruling dictatorship that goes about heavy-handed actions, making decisions with total disregard for people's feelings and what they are going through.

This is especially pertinent in the township of Irvinebank—a once-thriving town that lived on the tin mining industry, which was supplied by independent miners; it had nothing to do with big business. It was totally people driven—jobs, jobs, jobs and all that sort of stuff. It was in the heart of the Atherton Tableland in an incredibly remote and rural area. That area has been totally and utterly destroyed, not by economic rationalism or by a loss of income or by a loss of markets; it has been totally destroyed by Governments. That is what it is all about. That is why One Nation is here today. But I am continually amazed that no-one listens. Even right here and right now, I could be talking to the walls. No-one is listening. That is why I was sent here to this Parliament.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** I rise to a point of order. I was listening very carefully to the member for Tablelands.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr NELSON:** There probably is a point of order.

**An honourable member:** Don't argue with the Chair.

**Mr NELSON:** I should not argue with the Chair. However, there are a few members—but I should not be so——

**Mr Hamill:** Presumptuous?

**Mr NELSON:**—glib as to lump everyone into the same bag. I am sure that there are members of the Government—because we all know that the Labor Party is factional—who do listen, who do care and who do have some genuine interest in this issue.

I want to put it on record here and now, before we debate that motion tonight, that all I seek—and this is totally pertinent to the subject matter of this Matters of Public Interest debate—are some answers and some fair and just treatment. This is not going to bring down any Ministers or cost the Government votes. As a matter of fact, the people who brought this to me are staunch Labor supporters. Anyone can look at the record of voting in Irvinebank and see that. The simple fact is that it is going to provide some fair treatment for the people of my electorate. Not only that, it might wise up some of the hard hearts sitting opposite and on this side of the House.

I am here as a messenger from the people of Queensland and the people of Tablelands—like it or not—and so are the other 10 members sitting around me. Our message is that what is going on in this country is not working. The people are not happy. That is blatantly obvious to me, regardless of politics, and it is blatantly obvious to many people—1.2 million people in the Federal election and 428,000 people in the State election. The numbers are there. The attitude is there. What they are saying is, "Wake up and listen. Hear what we have to say. And in the Matters of Public Interest debate, please provide to us the Government that we deserve." I also want to put on record that, if the Government does not do this, if it continues to take away people's jobs, if economic rationalism drives people to unemployment queues, if people can no longer hope for any sort of guaranteed success in their future, and, on top of all the hardship that they already have to deal with, if they have their political voice taken away from them, as a person who has studied history, I ask: what are the outcomes of that? Every single time people have had that done to them, the outcomes have been horrendous for the Government and for the country that has imposed those things onto the people.

I bear a second warning to this Parliament: do not continue to harass, deride and denounce the vote for my party, the vote against the party system, the vote against economic rationalism, the vote against privatisation and the vote against the current direction of successive Governments in this country and do listen, because, if members continue to ignore the people of this State and the people of Australia who are discontented and not happy with what is going on in their country, members risk a lot more than a loss at an election or a loss of votes; they risk the ultimate sacrifice any Government can pay, that is, the loss of control over the attitudes of the people of this country and the loss of direction of this country as a whole.

Personally, I will not stand here and watch my democracy and a country of which I am an incredibly proud citizen be destroyed by Government attitude and Government inaction. I ask for answers to my questions, not rhetoric. I do not expect to be patronised and put down; I expect answers to legitimate questions. I expect them not as a member of Parliament but as a citizen who votes and who expects the Government to be totally open, transparent and accountable.

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