



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Death of Sir Charles Wanstall

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (9.54 a.m.): On behalf of the Liberal Party, I rise to support the motion moved by the Premier and seconded by the Leader of the Opposition. Sir Charles Wanstall was born in Brisbane in 1912, the son of a railway shunter—later an Agricultural Bank inspector—and the grandson of an early western teamster. I note that during his eulogy the chief justice remarked that he may have been related to the same group of teamsters in the early history of Queensland.

Sir Charles was educated at the Roma and Gympie State Schools and undertook secondary studies at the Gympie State High School, joining the Queensland Public Service in 1929. While working, he studied at night for five years, striving to improve his mind, and he passed his Bar examinations in 1933. He went into practice at the private Bar in 1936 and soon built up a large and lucrative practice, despite the lean Depression years. In 1939 he tried to enlist in the AIF, but he was not accepted for service. Instead, in an act of utter selflessness, he closed his practice and became a legal officer with the Commonwealth Crown Solicitor, such was his concern with national security legislation.

In 1938 he married Olwyn John, to whom he remained married until her death last year. Their marriage was a long and successful union and they had one daughter, Jonnie. In 1943 Sir Charles joined the Toowong branch of the newly formed Queensland People's Party. In 1944 he became the State member for Toowong and he remained there until 1950. Although we may never know his personal reasons for turning his back on a lucrative career in the law to serve as a parliamentarian, I believe it was based in a large part on Sir Charles' concern that the Queensland Government had forfeited too many of its States' rights at the request of the Commonwealth Government through the Commonwealth Powers Act of 1943. This is reflected in his maiden speech, which even on paper is confident and insightful and would rest easily in a book of historic speeches. Sir Charles' speech alludes to a great passion for his subject and a greater belief in the Queensland Constitution and the Queensland Government's power as an independent law maker. He stated—

"Not only did that Government pawn the rights of the people of this State without consulting their wishes—without obtaining the consent of the owners of those rights, the people—but having pawned them, they threw away the pawn ticket."

For the many Queenslanders who believed in States' rights, Sir Charles' warning could not have been more accurate.

Former Queensland Treasurer and Liberal Leader Sir Thomas Hiley described one of Sir Charles' speeches as a "classic example of parliamentary debate". Hansard has faithfully captured his mood and sometimes his irreverence to a subject, in particular when the Labor Government tried to reintroduce petrol rationing, arguing that Queensland's loyalty to Britain should be paramount. It is a well constructed argument against hypocrisy. It is said that the Government members were silenced by Sir Charles' arguments and the Opposition members tore up their speeches as they felt they could not contribute to the debate any better than Sir Charles. If honourable members look at Hansard, they will note that the debate ended rather abruptly.

Sir Charles also brought a level of practicality to the Queensland Parliament, suggesting that the Standing Orders Committee might devote some thought to the streamlining of parliamentary procedure. As mentioned by the Treasurer, he never failed to be amused by the fact that, when the

Speaker put the rather absurd question that a Bill, upon being introduced, be printed, the messenger stood at the end of the Chamber with the printed Bill in his hand.

In 1950 Sir Charles retired from Parliament to return to his vocation—the law. However, he gave the infant Liberal Party of Australia, Queensland Division, three years as president of the organisational branch, from 1950 to 1952. His retirement from Parliament obviously had not diminished his interest in Government policy or his desire to create a unified Queensland Liberal Party. In 1956 he became a QC. In 1958 he became a judge in the Queensland Supreme Court. As a judge, it is said that he gave his time obligingly to the fulfilment of justice, and as chief justice he brought a higher community esteem to the position. His judgments were thoughtful and he never succumbed to populist sentiment. On retiring, he said that he was most proud that he had maintained a unified bench instead of a group of single judges.

During his time on the bench, Sir Charles made a point of mentoring new barristers who, like himself, did not have the benefit of family connections to the law. During the late sixties, in one year only two newly admitted barristers met this criteria. One was his associate and is now the Honourable Justice Richard Chesterman and the other was Angus Innes, later a member of this House and Liberal Leader. In 1982 on his 70th birthday he retired from the bench. He had a run of bad health up to his retirement.

The true measure of a person such as Sir Charles, however, is not just a list of his own achievements, but also the contributions he made to the community. For more than 20 years, Sir Charles served as Chancellor of the Anglican Church in Australia. According to the Queensland Cancer Fund, he was their founding father, playing an active role since it was formed, taking the role of chairman in 1961 and remaining as a trustee until 1991. Such was his contribution to the fund there is a facility near the Royal Brisbane Hospital dedicated to Sir Charles—the Sir Charles Wanstall Apex Lodge, which houses those patients from the country who come to Brisbane for treatment. Other contributions to the community included seven years with the Queensland Ballet board, including three years as chairman, the Society Welfare Services, the committee for the Guide Dogs for the Blind and the Multiple Handicapped Association.

Husband and father, friend and benefactor to the less fortunate in the community, eminent jurist, the ninth member for Toowong and former Chief Justice of Queensland, Sir Charles Gray Wanstall will be missed. He set an example many strive to follow but few manage to match.
