



Speech by

**JACK PAFF**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST**

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### **COMMUNITY-BASED REFERENDUM BILL**

**Mr PAFF** (Ipswich West—ONP) (9.32 p.m.): I rise to support this Bill, designed to enable the people of Queensland to directly exercise their rights as citizens of a democracy. No place is a democracy where citizens are not collectively its sovereign. This Bill will overcome the democracy deficit in Queensland.

During this debate I have noticed that the Labor Party—the Government—has had the decency to listen to a community-based referendum Bill whereas very little interest has been shown on this side of the House. We in the One Nation Party represent about 200,000 people. That highlights the type of disrespect that those people are shown by the National/Liberal Party coalition.

**Mr Gibbs:** I stayed just to listen to your speech.

**Mr PAFF:** I did notice the attendance of the honourable member for Bundamba here tonight.

This Bill is necessary because politicians spend too much of their time trying to get into power, forgetting that they have only one role as members of this House: to genuinely and directly represent the people and the policy of the people from their own electorates. The role of Ministers is to be fully accountable to the members of this House. In that capacity they are not acting as representatives of the people at all but as members of the Executive Government.

Direct democracy is the right of the people in a democracy. It is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as one of the many fundamental rights to be readily exercisable in a real democracy. Those who oppose the rights of the people to exercise their direct say on matters they think important are the very kind of politicians who exist in dictatorships and totalitarian systems. The concept is well understood. The people in a democracy must have a real say in the actual laws under which they live. If not, we would be living in a dictatorship.

Our parliamentary system is debased when politicians do a deal to represent a party machine instead of the people of their electorate. This is pre-selling something they have no right to sell. They sacrifice democratic representation of the people to their self-interest and the self-interest of their party.

This Bill will give the people their rightful say on the issues they consider important. The process is available to the people in 24 States of the United States. Switzerland has had a form of direct democracy since 1848 and greatly enhanced it in 1874. This Bill will give the people of Queensland their direct voice.

Direct democracy is very popular. Once introduced, no country or State has ever voted to abolish it even though it would be a simple matter if the people so desired it. In British Columbia 80% of voters voted for direct democracy. In California, 85% voted for it. In Burnie, Tasmania, the vote was 87% in favour. Times are changing. It is patently clear that the politicians do not always know best and do not always want to listen to the people. Some politicians attend Parliament without having made a single personal contribution to bringing in legislation for the public good. This Bill provides a formal process, recognising the right of the electors to initiate laws and to vote on those laws.

The trigger mechanism of 2% of the number of electors on the electoral roll warrants comment. This number is far greater than the membership of any political party. It provides for far greater legitimacy as it is far more representative of electors. A senior adviser to Peter Reith said that any figure greater than 2% would create exponential degrees of difficulty in access of the rights of the people to

represent their issues. In real terms, as a proportion of the number of electors entitled to vote, this figure is quite high by international standards. A higher threshold would be sought by opponents of democracy to attempt to make the process an illusion of democracy because in real terms a 2% threshold is so high it will discourage frivolous or extreme proposals. Add to this the fact that that 2% must also be obtained in a majority of electorates of the State. That ensures in addition that this large number of signatories must have a wide geographical base.

Another recommendation for this Bill is that it is not contrary to the policies of the Labor Party or the coalition. T. J. Ryan, one of the great Labor Premiers of this State, was a great supporter of the rights of the people of Queensland to direct democracy. So too was Andrew Fisher, a former Prime Minister of Australia—another Queenslander. It is on record that the Liberal Party in Queensland has had the same policy and all but one parliamentary member of the National Party—who lost his seat in the last election—have stated their support.

We have the member for Crows Nest on videotape speaking in support in Canberra with the full support of his parliamentary leader. Also there was Trevor Perrett who pledged his support publicly for direct democracy. In the Liberal Party, we have the former member for Landsborough, the now member for Caloundra, supporting this in print and noting the backing of her then parliamentary leader. And, of course, we have Peter Reith, who has always been a believer of the right of the people to direct democracy. The proposal has substantial support privately from Federal members.

This Bill is entirely different as it is drafted with all the necessary checks. Lord Acton said, "In great wisdom all power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely". Only members of Parliament who do not trust the people of Queensland will vote against this Bill. That is obvious by the look of members on this side of the House.

This Bill will ensure a check against some of the corrupting influence of power by giving the people and their families a real say. Too many politicians get off on a power trip. In a democracy, the only role for elected representatives is to represent, not to exercise power for themselves or their mates.

Electors have a right to expect the Executive Government to govern according to law. A Parliament where the Executive is a collective junta or dictatorship over the Parliament and its proceedings is only a recent departure from the Westminster system—since the 1880s in the United Kingdom. The founding fathers of the Commonwealth Constitution did not believe in party dictatorships where the Parliament was a tame cat with members who were unable to exercise their conscience, unable even to represent the people of their electorates because their will was not being represented in the Parliament by the person they elected to do just that.

There is a dictatorial attitude among some politicians who claim that they are elected to govern. This is a falsehood. They are elected to represent. The Executive Government under the uncorrupted Westminster system sees each individual member of the Executive personally accountable to the Parliament. Corrupt abuse of the party system prefers gagging and shutting down Parliament to protect mates. That is not the attitude of a democrat who consults with the electorate. Only little Hitlers do what they like and ignore the electorate.

Community-based referendum is a practical mechanism that restores balance to the system of government. It is the Upper House of the people. In fact, the Labor Party believed that direct democracy to enable the people to exercise their rights as citizens was the proper replacement for the former Legislative Council, and it is still open to the Premier of this State in his role as a member of this House to take up the mantle of T. J. Ryan to accomplish his unfinished work for a real living democracy in Queensland. Democracy means simply "the people rule".

Our system of representative democracy flounders when representatives do not faithfully represent the will of the people of their electorates on any particular issue. This opens up a division between the electors and the representative, and democracy is the immediate victim. Democracy is not more Parliaments, more politicians or more committees, or even more public servants. It means simply that the people will be able to have their say on matters they consider important. Terry Gygar, a conscientious former member of this House—a Liberal in the true liberal tradition and not always appreciated for it—said that when people can have their say the quality and esteem of the Parliament will be greatly enhanced.

In Switzerland, 60% of proposals that qualify are taken up by the Parliament and enacted to the satisfaction of the people. The people are a far more reliable indicator of community needs and values than are members of parties, who are more interested in fighting each other for selfish gain, power over people, perks, jackpots and special favours from mates in power than in listening to or representing the people.

The people of my electorate knew that I would honour my pledge to them to recognise their right to have a direct say on issues that they consider important. I am here today honouring that pledge. I trust the people of my electorate and they have trusted me in return. No party comes between

me and the people of my electorate. This speech and my vote will be in my public duty to the people of my electorate who sent me here.

Democracy means that the people are empowered democratically as to the laws they live under 365 days of the year, not one day in three years. The born-to-rule cults belong to the divine right of kings or the opposers of democracy who have their say in some of the party machines opposed to direct democracy.

This Bill has every check and balance in it to ensure that the legislative proposals represented by it will be far more thoroughly scrutinised. There will be input by the whole of the community to scrutiny as well. Kim Beazley Snr admired the Swiss system, in which the members of the Parliament worked together and not against each other for the good of that country.

This Bill provides for the people of Queensland to enjoy the best form of government, where everyone can contribute to the public good of this great State, free at last from notions of absolute power which have corrupted so many members in the past. Because the criteria and checks and balances of this Bill are so strict, proposals from the people will be taken seriously. This Bill will ensure that elected representatives have some real idea of what the real people think, thus making good members of this House even better members for the good of the whole community of this State. I commend this Bill to the House.

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