



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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COMMUNITY-BASED REFERENDUM BILL

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (10.16 p.m.): The purpose of this Bill is to enable the electors of Queensland to have the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect their daily lives. Those were the words of the member for Caboolture who, I am assured, leads the One Nation Party—the same party whose media leader, Pauline Hanson, said that democracy is mob rule.

If we needed any more confirmation of doubts about their commitment to democracy, it was uncovered in the recent Sharples case, which found that One Nation duped the Electoral Commission and that it was not a democratic party at all; it was simply a triumvirate, which is why their parliamentary representation in this place has declined. It is part of the reason why the member for Caboolture's own party members in his electorate have deserted him with their branch president, Mr Tony McGregor, stating—

"Communication between the branches is forbidden. That is their idea of democracy at work."

I refer now to the democratic structure of One Nation—the party that wants all of the community to share in their democratic ideal. A Mr Carne, who on 13 April 1997 applied to join, was told by David Ettridge—

"All the members who pay a fee are not really members of the political entity. The only true members who have voting rights or any position in the political entity are the elected candidates only. This means we have full control of the organisation. If an elected candidate does not go along with what we say or direct them to do, we shall simply disendorse them."

That is One Nation's commitment to democracy: it will simply disendorse anybody who disagrees with it.

The judge in the Sharples case noted—

"There is no provision that membership of Pauline Hanson's One Nation entitles members to full voting rights at branch meetings or that membership of Pauline Hanson's Support Movement Inc allows entry to branch meetings."

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! I need to confer with the Clerk. The advice that I have received is that there is an appeal process in this matter. The member cannot refer to anything to do with the court case.

Mr MICKEL: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The whole business with One Nation showed that, within its structure, there is no commitment to democratic rights. The Bill seeks to lodge the names of electors with the Electoral Commission—the same commission that recently has been mentioned as having been duped or defrauded. The political party known as Pauline Hanson's One Nation did not have—

Mr FELDMAN: I rise to a point of order. We have been over this. Is this not raising a matter that is currently sub judice?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I have referred the member to the appeal. At this stage, I do not think that the comment that the member made actually related to that appeal. However, I will listen closely and confer further with the Clerk if necessary.

Mr FELDMAN: He is the member of the committee that drew a rather large brush earlier today. I think that if he is going to draw a rather large brush—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The member will resume his seat.

Mr MICKEL: I can understand the sensitivity of the honourable gentleman. I would be positively apoplectic if this sort of statement, that the show was not democratic at all, was made against me. The honourable member knows damned well that he did not have any voting rights. What are they doing parading around this place as some sort of democratic outfit? One of the member's own branch members in Caboolture said that it was not a democratic process and that they could not even talk to or write letters to one another. Despite that, they stand in this place tonight and talk about democracy. It is no wonder that the member is trying to interrupt me. If I had a track record like that, I would be up and down like a yoyo also, just as the honourable gentleman is.

Every member of the One Nation Party, past and present, went to the last election on a fraud. We all recall their great rhetoric: "We are here to talk about"—

Mr FELDMAN: I rise to a point of order. Again the member refers to the matter that is before the appeals court.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I do not believe that he did, but I will remind the member of what I said previously. I will listen closely to ensure that that is not the case.

Mr MICKEL: Again, I understand their sensitivity to this issue. When one considers that their branch structure is not democratic but is run by a triumvirate, it is no wonder that they are interrupting me tonight. That is what their whole process has been about. When they wandered in here, they said, "We are here to talk about our electorates." However, in over 90% of cases when they vote in this place, what do they do? They do not wonder about their electorates at all. They simply look to where the coalition is and they trot over there. They simply vote with the National Party.

Mr Dalgleish interjected.

Mr MICKEL: That demonstrates the hollowness of their rhetoric. I note David Ettridge's power to disendorse them if they mucked around.

Mr Dalgleish interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Hervey Bay will cease interjecting.

Mr MICKEL: Let him loose, Mr Deputy Speaker. He comes down here to Brisbane—

Mr Nuttall interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Sandgate will interject only from his correct seat and the member for Hervey Bay will cease interjecting.

Mr Dalgleish: I never said a word.

Mr MICKEL: Not a word that was intelligent, anyway. What we have are disaffected National Party voters who do not really believe in participatory democracy. They simply founded an outfit that they said would talk about democracy, but they have never believed in it.

On 27 April this year, the member for Barambah chose to highlight the cost of a referendum for constitutional change rather than rejoice in the fact that people were going to embrace it or have a say. On 23 July this year, the member for Burdekin, the Leader of the Country Party, who sadly is not with us tonight, said, "The referendum is going to be a waste of money and it is going to be a waste of time." Such is his commitment to participatory democracy. Even when the people with a track record of non-participatory democracy are given the opportunity to vote, all they do is simply highlight the cost, because they have no faith or belief in this parliamentary institution.

When asked to uphold the standards of the Parliament and vote on them, as they had to do recently when our good friend the member for Tablelands went astray, they simply voted in favour of wayward behaviour. If one does not believe that they do not want to participate in this place, one should look at how many of them put their names down for the Estimates committee process. Very few put their names down. That committee system focuses on problems in a non-partisan way and yet One Nation members have avoided it like Dracula would avoid a wooden cross. Even the Leader of the Country Party found membership of the Public Works Committee too taxing for his enormous intellect.

Mr FELDMAN: I rise to a point of order. We were offered only one position on those committees. I put that on the record.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. This is not a debate.

Mr MICKEL: The sensitive little petal rises again. Let us look at the experience of a similar democracy. The member for Gladstone chose to talk about New Zealand. I am happy to talk about New Zealand, which has one House of Parliament. That Parliament passed a citizens initiated referendums Act in 1993, which was similar legislation to that which is being debated tonight.

On 2 December 1995, the first CIR election was held. A group called the Professional Firefighters Union of New Zealand successfully conducted a petition and gained the required number of signatures to initiate a referendum. What was the question that was put at a cost of \$8.7m? It was: should the number of professional firefighters employed full time in the New Zealand fire service be

reduced below the number employed on 1 January 1995; yes or no? Quite unremarkably, it was carried. So little did the people think of that issue that only 27% of those eligible to vote bothered to turn up to vote for such an asinine question. The other ballot from New Zealand was initiated by the New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which was ruled invalid because, similar to what happened with One Nation, it had too many invalid signatures on it.

The devil in this Bill is in the detail. It proposes to reduce what can be very complex issues to a simple yes or no question. I believe that often those questions do not reflect the real sentiment of the electorate. They become the playthings of pressure groups. Worse, they become the playthings of the influential and wealthy groups that have the resources to back them, resulting in endless debate on complex issues. For example, pro and anti-abortion lobbies go back and forth with questions. It is the same with groups concerned about homosexual law reform, smoking, gambling, the death penalty and religion in schools. A never-ending series of moral issues are debated back and forth at the behest of citizens initiated referendums. Those referendums are supported by pressure groups with plenty of money rather than being representative of the general electorate.

In California, CIR was successful in limiting Government spending and preventing Government borrowing. When the budgeted money ran out and the garbage started to pile up in the streets and services were cut, people were unhappy with the Government. However, the Government was forced to implement the decision. As I said, the reality is that many of the issues are complex. It is not wrong for people to enjoin Government to highlight their individual problems. Government is challenging because it is called upon to umpire competing interests.

We are elected into this place for a number of reasons: to speak out on behalf of residents in our electorates, to play a role in the parliamentary system, and to investigate issues affecting the State. All of those are interwoven into the job. People put us here to represent them and that is what we are to do. One Nation was put here because of a backlash against the conservative parties and it has rewarded those people by overwhelmingly voting with the National Party in most of the divisions that have occurred in this place. If people who voted other than for the National Party feel that One Nation members and the now Independents have let them down, the blame lies fairly and squarely with the One Nation Party which has let them down.

It is time that we restated our faith in parliamentary democracy. Even the member for Gladstone spoke tonight in support of CIR. She was in charge of the Calliope Shire for five years, but I do not recall that that shire embraced CIR. When one is an Independent it is very easy. However, when it was the member's task to administer the Calliope Shire, she did not rush forward with a CIR proposal.

It is up to us to reflect the community, and by and large this Parliament does that. Tonight it is time that we restated our faith in parliamentary democracy. Parliament is the law-making body. People are free to speak out in this place on behalf of local residents, and they do. The party system is part of the democratic system. The established parties have democratic structures and they democratically elect their leaders. All of these principles are foreign to One Nation and, finding nothing of solace in their own party and given their complete inability to come to terms with our own parliamentary system, they have settled on this extra-parliamentary device. Under our current system, people have their say daily. They can reach any of us and give us their points of view, ideas and problems. It is a brave or foolhardy member who constantly remains oblivious and insensitive to public opinion. Because I believe in this place and I am proud to represent my electorate in this Chamber—and I am honoured to speak on its behalf—I think this Bill should be rejected overwhelmingly.
