



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Anderson Dawson Centenary

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.34 a.m.), by leave: Today is an historic day for Queensland, and, in particular, an historic day for the Australian Labor Party. Today marks the 100th anniversary of the swearing in of Anderson Dawson as Premier of Queensland, the first Labor Premier in the first Labor Government in the world. Anderson Dawson was an ex-miner and newspaperman, miners union president, republican, chairman of the 1891 strike committee in Charters Towers and member for Charters Towers—a very colourful character in a very colourful period.

While the history books record that the minority Dawson Government lasted just seven days, the legacy of that administration is with us still. Born on the industrial battlefields of Barcaldine in 1891, the Queensland Labor Party had as its central tenet the belief that all women and men are entitled to be treated equally. That belief remains the heart and soul of the Labor Party today.

The world's first Labor Government also marked the beginning of a major change in democracy, that is, that all sections of society were empowered through the ballot box. Anderson Dawson's political opponents in 1899 were elitist and privileged. It was Labor that represented everyone, no matter what their background or circumstance. Importantly, the Dawson administration proved that Labor could form Government. In fact, Labor enjoyed 39 years in Government between 1915—when T. J. Ryan won a comprehensive victory—and 1957. Labor's time on the Government benches led to significant changes in politics, and these shifts were of lasting benefit to voters and Queenslanders.

Anderson Dawson believed the most effective way to change society for the better was to work through the Parliament, rather than through direct action. It is believed this attitude stemmed from the shearers strike of 1891 at Barcaldine which was brutally repressed by the authorities. Anderson Dawson was not the only leader of his time who adopted this approach. William Kidston, the bookseller and publicist who later became Premier of Queensland, penned a poem in 1891 entitled "The Ballot is the Thing".

Mr Schwarten: Member for Rockhampton.

Mr BEATTIE: A lot of good people come from Rockhampton. There are exceptions, but a lot of good people came from Rockhampton, including the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing.

Mr Borbidge: He's a bit of a poet.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, he is a bit of a poet. It seems to be a tradition of central Queensland.

However, returning to the poem of William Kidston titled "The Ballot is the Thing", it says in part—

"Throw your old guns aside, my boys;
the ballot is the thing."

Anderson Dawson told Parliament on this day 100 years ago—

"I want this House and every member of this House and every member of any party or section in this House to thoroughly understand our position, and that is that we take the public life of the colony very seriously ..."

That belief in the supremacy of the ballot and the Parliament resonates just as strongly today. The great thing about a democratic society is that change can occur through the ballot box. In Queensland—in the past 10 years, for example—the Premiership has passed through six hands without the spilling of one drop of blood. That is the strength of our democracy. Parliament remains the supreme institution of the people.

Later today I will officially launch a book that brings to life the power and the politics of the 1890s and the all-too-brief existence of the Dawson Government. Written by respected Queensland historian Professor Ross Fitzgerald, "Seven days to remember—the world's first Labor Government" is a poignant account of Dawson's drive to make life better for all Queenslanders. I table a copy of that book for the information of the House. Professor Fitzgerald writes—

"Although doomed to failure, Dawson's action in forming a minority, all-Labor ministry was a courageous one. In large part, this was determined by Labor's wish to appear as 'a constructive party' which was willing, when asked, to accept the reins of Government."

Labor Governments are often courageous. Labor Governments are determined to make a difference. I know that in some Governments from time to time the Ministers are more interested in driving around in limousines looking at their navels. Governments that make a difference, such as Labor Governments, are ones that look after the electorate. It is our side of politics that is committed to ideals; it is our side that reforms; it is Labor that constructively reshapes society through the parliamentary process to improve benefits for all Queenslanders.

In the 100 years since the Dawson Government, Labor administrations in Queensland and Australia have advanced the living conditions of all Australians. The great thing about the Labor party is that it embraces everyone. It believes in equity, fairness and a fair go for all. Anderson Dawson wanted to give workers a stake in Government and a say in their future. He paved the way for Governments that worked for ordinary families rather than working against them. For the first time ordinary Queenslanders knew that their interests, daily struggles, hopes and aspirations would be acknowledged in the corridors of power. My Government has a similar goal. We want all Queenslanders to have an assured place in the new millennium. Our Smart State policies will ensure that our children are educated in skills so that they can stake their claim in the high-tech global society that is emerging.

The Queensland Labor Party will mark the centenary of the Dawson Government in a number of ways. This weekend I will be leading my ministerial colleagues to Charters Towers for my Government's 21st Community Cabinet meeting. I believe that a Community Cabinet meeting which takes Government to the people in our huge and decentralised State is the most fitting way to honour the memory of Premier Dawson. The Dawson Government's defeat on the floor of the Parliament will be re-enacted on stage almost 100 years to the day, and the Attorney-General will be one of the stars in that play.

Mr McGrady: And the Minister for Mines and Energy.

Mr BEATTIE: I was coming to that. We would never leave out the Minister for Mines and Energy. Both of those Ministers will star. We might even have a role for the Leader of the Opposition—we need someone to sell Jaffas and so on at half-time.

A commemorative headstone will be erected at the grave of Anderson Dawson, which has until now been marked only with his name and year of death. The headstone will recognise his exalted place in Labor history. The Labor Party owes much to Anderson Dawson. As the Labor Premier of Queensland in 1999, I proudly celebrate the 100th anniversary of the election of the first Labor Government in the world.

Tomorrow I will also be proud to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the eighty-niners—that eminent group of parliamentarians on this side of the House who were elected on 2 December 1989 as part of the incoming Goss Labor Government. Later today this distinguished group will gather for an official photograph on the steps leading to the Speaker's Green—that is, the 15 survivors who are still here. As a proud member of the eighty-niners—as is Mr Speaker—might I say that 2 December 1989 has a special place in the history of Queensland and the Australian Labor Party. In conclusion, may I simply say that December is a very good month for the Australian Labor Party.

I note that former Premier Dawson died at the age of 47. I am a bit sensitive about that, being 47 myself.

Mr Borbidge: Far too young.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes. Being 47 myself, I realise that he died far too young. Honourable members should appreciate what a tough life that poor individual had. Honourable members should think about this for a minute.

Mrs Edmond: We've improved the health system since then.

Mr BEATTIE: We have improved the health system since then. Honourable members should reflect on the life of this poor individual.

Mr Borbidge: It is not the years; it's the mileage.

Mr BEATTIE: That is exactly right. He moved with his family to Given Terrace, Paddington.

Mr Schwarten: From Rockhampton.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, from Rockhampton.

One day, while his father had gone to do some shopping, his mother stood up from her reading and went to do some work in the kitchen. Her dress caught alight and she burnt to death. She was admitted to hospital at 2 a.m. and died the next morning. A short time later, his sister died of an unknown disease. The father was so distressed that he left. Young Dawson then went to an orphanage for three years, before he was taken by foster parents to live in Charters Towers. His father died in an asylum, which then stood where Wolston Park is today. His foster father, who was an alcoholic, had a small accident at Charters Towers in which he fell over and drowned in a small quantity of water. He was later to become the Federal Defence Minister. In 1909, because Federal Parliament was meeting and he had been elected as a senator, Dawson left his family in Melbourne. In 1910 he came back to Queensland and died of alcoholism. That is shown on the birth certificate. He had a pretty rough life.

A Government member: Death certificate.

Mr BEATTIE: Sorry, I meant to say "death certificate". I am obviously overawed by what happened to this poor family. Those were tough times.

In conclusion, I draw to the attention of honourable members the fact that today is a great day.
