



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 2 March 1999

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Deaths of Mr R. T. McLean, MLA, and Mr L. J. Yewdale, MLA

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.42 a.m.): In rising to second the condolence motion moved by the Premier, I would say at the outset that it is always a privilege and a sad duty to speak in this place as we remember our colleagues on both sides of the House who have given great service to the State of Queensland. Today I pay tribute to Ron McLean and to Les Yewdale, firstly, in respect of Les' contribution to the Parliament and to his electorate and to the State.

I think it is probably fair to say that he was not necessarily a high-profile member of this House. His talent was elsewhere. He knew it and that was also the mark of the man. He was a local member—a consummate local member—and he was proud of it, and so he should have been. The electors of Rockhampton North lost a good local member when he retired at the 1989 State election. He had served them for 17 years, a proud record in itself.

When he made his final speech in this Chamber on 19 October 1989, he said that he would like to refer to the forthcoming elections. He said—

"I will be delighted to return to this place as a visitor and enjoy the thrill of a Labor Government on the Treasury benches."

No-one on this side of the House then or now would want to have denied him the chance to experience that thrill once polling day was out of the way. That is the true spirit of democratic politics and the Australian way. It was, indeed, Les' personal tragedy that after 17 years in Parliament, including the cricket team era of 1974-77 when the ALP had only 11 members, he felt the need to retire on the eve of his party attaining Government.

While it is true, as I have just remarked, that Les Yewdale was not a high-profile member of Parliament, he scaled the heights in another direction within this House. He was captain of the Queensland parliamentary bowls team and, as many have cause to remember, bowled a mean end in the Commonwealth-wide parliamentary bowls championship. The traditional status of bowls in the parliamentary system, like much else in this place, transcends the practice of partisan competition. On the greens it was Queenslanders versus the rest, with many firm friendships made across party lines. Outside the sphere of parliamentary sport, Les was a lifetime Rugby League supporter. Indeed, he was a life member of the QRL and a follower of racing.

It is good to be reminded, even though it is in this instance by the sad passing of a former member of this House, that politics is not necessarily the only game in town. As many of us in the present House have reason to reflect, friendships can and do cross party lines. Mutual respect for opponents as much as for people within one's own party or allied parties generally does. Les Yewdale spent many years in this place as an effective local member. He made many friends and most certainly drew respect from all of his colleagues. His successor in Rockhampton North, now the Minister for Public Works and Housing, paid generous tribute to him in his maiden speech in this Chamber on 7 March 1990. I am sure that the Minister will not mind my quoting a little from what he said on that occasion. He said—

"It is little wonder that he is held in such high regard both inside and outside the electorate by all those who know him."

I am among those who knew Les Yewdale and I can attest to the truth of these sentiments. I held him in high regard as a worthy opponent. On behalf of the Opposition, I extend our deepest sympathy to his family on his passing and I place on record an acknowledgment of honour to a life well lived.

Ron McLean was a Labor veteran who always stood up for what he believed in. He represented the seat of Bulimba for 12 years, the seat now held by the Government Deputy Whip. During that time, Ron McLean always represented his people with a great passion. In the great tradition of parliamentary government, he was first and foremost a local member. When he died last month at an age younger than is the average nowadays, he was rightly mourned by his friends, political and personal, and my colleague the member for Clayfield represented the Opposition leadership at the State funeral held at Doomben Racecourse.

It was often said by his opponents that Ron was a hard man. I believe that that was always meant as a compliment. Ron fought hard for his beliefs and for those he felt had been disadvantaged or discriminated against. There is much honour in that, in holding true to one's lights. On an occasion such as this it is proper that this honour in him is noted.

Ron had a varied parliamentary career, one in which he often made himself noticed—and notable—in the House and more broadly in the political environment. He had come from the school of hard knocks via the Waterside Workers Federation and, as the Premier indicated, was a son of Townsville. He was bound to make his mark with a pedigree like that. Ron joined the Cabinet in the first Goss Government and served as Minister for Administrative Services from December 1989 until September 1992.

We on this side of the House remember Ron as a big-hearted man, ever ready to be combative in whatever cause it was that he pursued, but also as a man who valued friendship and who, away from the heat of political debate, was a true parliamentary colleague of one and all. I can remember one of the great occasions which I think said volumes about Ron McLean. We had had an all night sitting. From memory, the legislation was an Aboriginal land Bill being presided over by the then Minister, the now member for Kennedy, Mr Katter. There had been numerous divisions during the course of the night. Parliament had sat on and there was considerable debate during the course of the evening. Parliament sat and sat and sat. Come the next morning, at breakfast time the House was still in session. Ron thought these were absolutely appalling working conditions and he rose to a point of order and moved that the House adjourn for breakfast. The Speaker of the day took a dim view of that and told Ron to sit down, but Ron was persistent and paid the price. He was subsequently asked to leave the Chamber, but as he went out he was muttering—in fact, I think he was shouting—"Mr Speaker, everyone is entitled to some conditions." I think the goodwill, kind-heartedness and basic decency of Ron McLean was seen in that particular episode.

His interest in community affairs represented almost a lifelong crusade. It was something on which he was never lacking in energy. So too with sport, in particular football and golf, and of course fishing—a pastime he honoured with close attention and a wealth of knowledge.

It can certainly be said that Queensland would have been much the poorer without having had the services of Ron McLean in State politics. I extend to his family and to his many friends the sympathy of members on this side of the House.
