



Speech by

## Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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Hansard 26 October 1999

### MOTION OF CONDOLENCE Death of Sir Charles Wanstall

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE** (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.47 a.m.): It is a privilege to second the motion of condolence proposed to the House by the Premier. Sir Charles Wanstall was a rare man. We honour him not only as a past Chief Justice of this State but also as a member of this House, albeit a member for only six years and a full half century ago. He is part of the honoured history of the State of Queensland. He was a true conservative and also a true progressive. Some people see conservatism and being progressive as separate functions, but this is not so and people like Sir Charles Wanstall prove the point admirably. I am particularly grateful to my colleague the member for Indooroopilly, whose electorate includes the seat Sir Charles represented half a century ago, for the interesting and sensitive obituary that he contributed to the Australian.

Sir Charles was indeed a rare man. His life epitomised the opportunities that ordinary people find open to them in a great democracy such as ours. His beginnings were humble but he achieved greatness, and that is the essence of Australia and Queensland. Ours is a country and a State where the able and the intelligent can rise naturally to the top from any of life's stations. This is a country that is rewarded with an absence of artificial barriers.

Of course, it is not a place where advancement can come without the application of effort or bipartisan preferment and we must always strive to keep it that way. Sir Charles is among the many others who stand tall in the history of Australia who would want it that way. He was a man who kept the conservative faith in the forward-looking way that true conservatives always do. He had no time for cant. He would not cling to the past or try to return there in social or political fields or in the law for any reason. However, in his many public comments throughout his long life, he did show a tremendous appreciation of the fact that the past—while it is another country far away, from which we are irrevocably separated—is the foundation stone of any community's future.

He served Queensland extraordinarily well as a lawyer who had come into the law the hard way, working as a clerk and studying at night and passing his Bar examinations in 1933, and later he served with high distinction as a justice of the Supreme Court and later chief justice. Also, he served Queensland and the electors of the then seat of Toowong well in his four years as their representative and as a member of the Queensland People's Party in this place. His lawyer's skills and his forensic language made a number of people uncomfortable from time to time. I was reminded of his skills as a debater who was difficult to beat and of his view of proper public policy by the Hansard reports of several of his forays against opponents of his party. His savaging of Labor's record on petrol rationing—it had opposed it in 1940 at the opening of the war, yet it supported it, based on what Sir Charles described as a highly debatable reading of Commonwealth powers, in 1949, when the war was long over—and of several luminous personalities of the day was a masterly example of his art. Others no doubt can tell us more about that occasion and perhaps share with us further examples from his life. I will say simply that I recommend interested members read the Hansard of his contribution to the debate on the Liquid Fuel Bill—at pages 1554 to 1559 of the Hansard for 1949—as a masterly lesson in how to devastate our opponents without, in the language and practice of today, being smart.

Queensland's history is rich in the number of its people who have served the public interest with consummate skill and dedication. It is not given to many to rise to the summit. Today we can reflect in

this place—the people's place—on just what it is that we owe to Sir Charles Wanstall and others of his ilk. Our debt is great and can never be repaid, except by keeping the faith. It is the genius and the natural humility of people such as Sir Charles that, in this great community of egalitarian thought and practice, bring to bear on public life the best of the old—our proud traditions planted here with us from Britain— combined with the best of the new, that is, our creation of a robust and democratic Australian society.

Sir Charles was a man of the 20th century. His place in the history of 20th century Queensland is secure. It is honoured and it is richly deserved. On behalf of the Opposition, I extend our condolences and our thoughts to his family and friends.

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