



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 10 December 1999

VALEDICTORY

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.18 p.m.): I am happy to join with the Premier in making this Valedictory address, one of the traditions of longest standing in this Parliament. I think for those people who are not part of the Parliament, it is a rather curious exercise that from time to time they must have some difficulty in understanding. But that is the nature of this place and that is the tradition of this place.

I thank the Premier and the members of his Government for the best wishes that they have extended to Opposition and non-Government members, and I am replying on their behalf on this occasion. On behalf of members on this side of the House I extend reciprocal good wishes to members of the Government and also to you, Mr Speaker.

Last year the valedictory took place at an earlier stage in the calendar. I remarked upon this event at the time, noting that the coalition Government that I led until the middle of 1998 had been energised and open enough to make Parliament work until a little closer to Christmas. This year the Government has managed to keep us here until the end of the second week in December. It might like to suggest that this is because it is energised enough to do so. The people will make a judgment on that. I am sure that, in the nature of this debate, it would be quite inappropriate for me to suggest that it might be due to any failure on the part of the Government to control its own parliamentary timetable. However, this is not the occasion to be overtly political. This is a sometimes fractious place. But it is also a place where, as we often thankfully have cause to note, friendship and fellowship transcend party politics.

Last year at this time I noted that the 49th Parliament is a very different place from the 48th. It is still being a different place. I think that, for observers of political history, those of us who are participants in Queensland politics seem to be capable of continuing to write new chapters in the book. The 1998 parliamentary year spanned two Parliaments and two minority Governments. It also marked the first time that a fracturing of the party system had created in this place a crossbench party in significant numbers.

The 1999 parliamentary year has seen the Labor Party acquire majority status, barely—something we should all remember—and the recasting of politics on the crossbenches. I believe this process is far from being at an end. This might be an appropriate time to invite all members of this place to reflect on the real imperatives of politics in the Queensland of today.

On the question of change and changing times, I would like to make special mention of my colleague the honourable member for Crows Nest, who has decided to retire from the front bench this Christmas and to serve out his time in this Parliament on the back bench. I am sure everyone in this House will want, as I do, to honour Russell Cooper for his service to his State, both in this place and outside. I know that Russell, with the freedom of being a backbencher, looks forward to somewhat of a roving commission next year in terms of his contributions to debates in this place.

I wish every member the compliments of the season and the thanks of both the Opposition and the previous Government for their contributions to the proceedings of this place. I thank the hardworking members of the Opposition front bench. I mention particularly my friend the member for Charters Towers, who in the redistribution experienced a constituency growing so greatly that he felt he

must quit the front bench to look after his people there. I believe that my colleagues have consistently demonstrated their determination and energy in always striving to do what is best for Queensland.

During the course of the year we said farewell—a final sad farewell—to a number of former members of this place. I believe it is appropriate to mention them in this valedictory. 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 the Government Whip, the equally feisty Pat Purcell—and, in the great tradition of parliamentary Government, was first and foremost a local member. When he died in February, at an age rather younger than is the average nowadays, Ron McLean was rightly mourned, and not only by his friends, political or personal.

It was often said by his opponents that Ron was a hard man. I believe 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. 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 a man who valued friendship and who away from the heat of political debate was a true parliamentary colleague of one and all.

We lost Rex Pilbeam, long-term Mayor of the fine city of Rockhampton and the member in this place for Rockhampton South for nine years from 1960 to 1969. Rex Pilbeam was a leader. Indeed, he adopted Rex as his preferred name as a young boy, convinced that, since it was the Latin word for king, it was an admirable name for a leader. Rockhampton was indeed fortunate to have so able an advocate for its cause as the capital city of central Queensland. Rex Pilbeam lived a full life. He was in many ways Rex of Rockhampton—king of Rockhampton—over three decades during which the city gained the benefits of a modern infrastructure.

We lost Charles Rappolt, the member for Mulgrave from June to November 1998. Charlie was an unlikely MP, elected in unlikely circumstances. The circumstances of his passing were especially sad. It is a tribute to the fellowship of this place that when we were called upon to place our condolences on the record all among us who spoke remembered Charlie the man and honoured him as friends should.

We lost Douglas Sherrington. Doug Sherrington was a Labor man in the tradition—the proud tradition—of his party in those distant days. He did the hard yards. The fact that his parliamentary service, as the member for Salisbury, ended fully a quarter of a century before we were called upon to mark his passing diminished that event not one bit. Doug Sherrington was never in Government—he served the people through Labor's lean years—but he did serve as a parliamentary secretary and Opposition Whip. He was also an early conservationist, a partisan for that cause, and the author of a bitter poem entitled *The Conservationist's Lament in the Old Curiosity State*.

We said goodbye to Sir Charles Wanstall, a rare man indeed. Sir Charles—plain Mr Wanstall then—was member for Toowong from 1944 to 1950. We honoured him in our condolences not only as a past member of this place but also as a past Chief Justice. He is part of the honourable history of the State of Queensland. He was a true conservative but also a true progressive. Some people see conservatism and progressivism as separate functions, but this is not so and people such as Sir Charles Wanstall prove the point admirably.

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—so far from the silver spoon as to be an impossible distance from privilege in any society bound by class. That is the essence of Australia and of Queensland. We are a country and a State where the able and the intelligent rise naturally to the top from any of life's stations. This is a place crowned with an absence of artificial barriers. We must always strive to keep it that way. Sir Charles, among the many others who stand tall in the story of Australia, would want it that way.

We also lost Les Yewdale. Les was not a high-profile member of this House. His talent lay elsewhere. He knew it—also the mark of the man. He was a local member and proud of it. And so he should have been. The electors of Rockhampton North lost a good local member when Les retired at the 1989 State election. He had served them for 17 years—a proud record in itself.

In any Parliament the life of a Whip can be a torrid one. In a closely matched situation, both Government and Opposition Whips have a particularly hard job to do. It is interesting watching the chemistry between the Government and Opposition Whips when we have a series of close divisions, as we have had today, with both sides checking the other side's numbers to obviously observe that, shall we say, there have not been any stuff-ups in terms of the pairs or those sometimes gentlemen's agreements that very often are the reason this place works as well as it does.

I pay tribute to the Opposition Whips, Mr Baumann and Mr Hegarty; to the Government Whips, Mr Purcell and Mr Sullivan; to the One Nation Whip, Mr Paff; and to the member for Gladstone, Mrs Cunningham, who has taken up somewhat of a role in that line on behalf of the Independent members of late. They have all played their part in assisting with the job of keeping the House running smoothly.

It is, of course, perfectly true that no Parliament would work at all without the energy and expertise of its supporting staff. I want to mark the service to this place of Mr Ted Newton, whose wealth of knowledge of this place and of parliaments generally was lost when he left the parliamentary staff this year.

The Clerk of the Parliament, Mr Doyle, has as always been unfailing in the support and sound advice he gives to all members, often under very difficult circumstances.

I acknowledge the fine services of the following: the Clerk Assistant (Table) and Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr Ian Thompson; the Second Clerk-Assistant, Mr Barry Sanderson; the Parliamentary Officer (Votes), Ms Annette Henery; the parliamentary officers in Bills and Papers; and Messrs Bob Bradbury, Brett Charlier and Andrew Timperley. The Chief Librarian, Mr Nick Bannenberg, and the library staff have continued to provide service at a level of excellence that is a tribute to them all.

Special mention should again be made of the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, headed by Peter Drew. Although the Parliament now operates with a Government in majority, albeit by only one—the power of one we have witnessed here today—the workload of the office has remained at significantly higher rates than has been customary. I speak for everyone, but I especially speak for my staff in the Opposition office, when I say how grateful we are for their professionalism and their wise counsel.

I also take this opportunity to thank my staff in the Opposition office. I also want to thank the staff who service the backbench members on both sides of the House over in the Annexe in terms of secretarial support. They play a very important role in this place.

Parliament's increased workload, as I noted in my 1997 valedictory address as Premier, has increased substantially through the changes we made to the committee system—changes which I am glad to see continue to be supported by Labor in office. I add my congratulations to those of the Premier in his address to the Hansard staff led by Mr Alan Watson. I think we very often forget that, if we sit late, Hansard sit later, and a late night or an early morning for us is a later night or a later morning for the dedicated officers who serve this Parliament so well in that capacity.

My thanks, too, to the officers responsible for the Corporate Services and Members Support Program; everyone on the administrative staff; the Chief Parliamentary Attendant, Mr Kevin Jones, and his staff; and the security staff under their coordinator, Ms Geraldine Broerse. As always, they have performed their duties with courtesy and efficiency. Let it be noted that this is always appreciated.

I add my appreciation to that noted by the Premier for the enthusiastic staff in Education and Training under Graeme Kinnear. They are responsible for much of what the public sees about how Queensland's Parliament works.

Parliament could not function without its telephonists and executive assistants and would not get anywhere at all, I am sure, without the Catering Division under Mr Jaakko Ponsi and executive chef Sucil De Silva, who continue to add to the developing history of Australian cuisine.

My thanks, too, to Mr John McDonough and Property Services, who keep the whole precinct spick and span. Among the cleaning staff, who all do a wonderful job with unfailing courtesy and great determination, I especially want to recognise Patricia Murphy. Pat's sterling efforts within the Opposition offices are truly appreciated by all. Her good humour under every circumstance is a true boon in a pressured environment.

The gardens and lawns, as always, have been a delight throughout the year. Our new head gardener, Mr Shaun Stewart, has stepped admirably into the role that John Pullman, who retired last year, filled so ably for 26 magnificent years. Our gardeners maintain a green oasis here in the middle of the city—as some would say, sanity where insanity sometimes prevails.

The parliamentary press gallery again has reason, one would hope, for concluding that the year has produced some interesting copy—print and electronic. For our part, we in this House always look forward to seeing our endeavours reported widely and accurately. Last year, and the year before, I remarked that it is often astonishing what is left unreported from this place and astounding what is sometimes regarded as worth reporting. I said I suspected that it would still be relevant to repeat that comment this year. It is. I suspect that it will still be relevant for a long time to come. But the press gallery has an important and historic role in the Legislature. I thank its members for their scrutiny in the public interest over the past year.

Of course, none of us here could function without the close support of our electorate office staff. On behalf of non-Government members, I offer my thanks to them for their efforts this year—as always, efforts made at the highest levels of endeavour.

I want to place on record particular appreciation to Ros Bennett, my electorate secretary. She has had, in many respects, a challenging time of late. She knows what I mean. I want to thank her sincerely for what she has had to endure in recent times.

I thank the Opposition staff, a team of which we on this side of the House can all be proud. In Government and in Opposition, members and staff alike always have to be ready to put their families and loved ones, and their private lives and pleasures, to one side in pursuit of the matter of the moment. Only dedicated people are prepared to do that, and this is truly one comment that in this place can be made in a wholly bipartisan way in respect of each one of the 89 members who comprise the Parliament of Queensland.

I certainly could not have kept up the pace required of a political leader without the support and affection of my family. Again, as I noted last year, my wife, Jennifer, has selflessly maintained her deep understanding of the disruptions to normal life that flow from being a parliamentarian. My children have continued their generous and ready acceptance that sometimes—too often—their dad cannot be there with them in person, but always is in spirit.

This is the people's House. This is the forum in which the people are supreme. We are all here—whether in office or in Opposition, or on the cross benches—as the servants of the people who elected us to our seats.

Last year in the valedictory address, I noted that the 12 months then just passed had been fractious ones. It had been a time in which, in a place less committed to democracy than our Queensland society so definitely is, we might have had an angry year. This year has been no different in any fundamental sense. It is to the credit of every Queenslanders that we have continued to see that, in Australia, much more binds us together than will ever drive us apart—and to see that that benefit is best protected by the good humour and decency that our society tolerates and obviously permits and nurtures.

In any Parliament, members will debate and argue and be frank and be angry and be abusive. I have very often said that a Parliament that is dull is not a Parliament. I mean, this is not a debating society. A Parliament that works properly should be a place where all the various opinions within society come together, and sometimes those opinions are not shared by a majority of members. But the day that the Parliament becomes dull and boring will be the day that this place is a Parliament in name only, and it is important that we nurture that right to debate, that right to be heard in this place. That is what parliamentary democracy is all about. We all know that great issues are at stake; that firm opinions are held; that forthright points of view are expressed. Our job as members is to ensure that these things continue as the mechanism by which we manage the governance of this State.

Our resolution for the new year nearly upon us—and in the spirit of the times, for the third millennium, which I am reliably informed will begin 387 days from now—must be to come back here in the year 2000 and, subsequently, to do better by our fellow citizens than we have ever done before. Our task as a society is to build a better society—a better, more caring, more inclusive, more freedom-loving society.

I wish all honourable members, their families and their staff and the staff of the Parliament all the very best for a happy and safe Christmas and new year.
