



Speech by

**WARREN PITT**

**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

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Hansard 2 March 1999

**ADDRESS IN REPLY**

**Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (2.30 p.m.): It is great to be back. It is great to be given the opportunity once more to represent the people of Mulgrave in the Queensland Legislative Assembly. It is great to return to this House as a Labor member after an absence of three years on the political sidelines and to be in a position to put the case for regional Queensland and far-north Queensland in particular.

Fighting for a fair go is something in which I have always believed. "Putting the Far North First" is not only my campaign theme; it is the very reason that I entered politics in the first place. The term of the previous coalition Government was a low point for the far north, with the area being ignored because they neglected Queensland north of Noosa. Who could forget the speed with which the former Treasurer moved to lift the toll on the Sunshine Motorway, leaving others across the State to pick up the bill?

The coalition in Government did not take long to revert to the Bjelke-Petersen days of cover up and cosy up. They were quick to cosy up to powerful vested interest groups. They covered up secret deals. The secret memorandum of understanding with the Police Union is a symbol of their continuing contempt for the public good. They resorted to covering up for incompetent Ministers. The Queensland coalition demonstrated that it was prepared to waste taxpayers' money on bogus inquiries simply for the purpose of self-preservation. The Connolly/Ryan witch-hunt was not an inquiry at all; it was a blatant misuse of public funds and a symbol of the preparedness of the National and Liberal Parties to risk fundamental judicial safeguards in this State in order to save their political hides. They never learned the lessons of the excesses of the 1980s and the findings of the Fitzgerald inquiry. They demonstrated yet again that the concept of separation of powers was beyond them.

Worse still, these champions of States' rights and Canberra bashers from way back were dismal as they caved in to their Canberra mates at every turn. The National Party's sell-out to the Liberals in Canberra on every important issue makes a mockery of their claim to truly represent the people of rural and regional Queensland. They must share the responsibility for increasing nursing home fees, savage cuts to child care, the closing down of regional Federal services, accepting second-best health funding, the neglect of the unemployed, divisive industrial disputes, the imposition of a goods and services tax, uranium mining in national parks and, more recently, the disgraceful cuts to university funding. Only the Labor Party has consistently stood up to be counted for Queenslanders on these critical issues.

By deserting provincial Queenslanders, the Nationals must also bear responsibility for that cancer on the body politic of this nation—the rise of the One Nation Party. I accept the view that all major parties have contributed in some way by losing touch with the electorate and not adequately addressing real and perceived concerns expressed by ordinary citizens. However, it is in the National Party heartland that One Nation developed most quickly and from where the more extreme notions that pass for genuine policy emanated.

The National Party cynically turned a blind eye to the rantings and ravings of the lunatic fringe in the vain hope that the tide of anger would work in their favour. Several National Party members openly courted the One Nation vote, only to be bitten badly at the ballot box. Many National Party figures chose to become One Nation chameleons in a bid for the dissident vote. The National Party has set about stealing what passes for One Nation policy as it drifts further to the extreme Right.

The principled stance of the Labor Party on the extremist views of the One Nation hierarchy enables all members of the Labor Party to hold their heads high. This is especially so given the recent details of the undemocratic manner in which One Nation conducts its internal business. The national socialist—read "Nazi"—nature of One Nation is cause for concern to us all. We are indeed lucky that the electorate has seen this movement for what it is and rejected it at the ballot box at the October Federal election.

At the 5 December by-election, the people of Mulgrave rejected ineffective representation. They rejected the culture of complaint fostered by a party long on finger pointing but short on real answers. They rejected the lowest common denominator campaigning of personal denigration by master puppeteer David Oldfield in favour of the positive approach of the Beattie Labor Government.

Alarm bells must be ringing for the electors of New South Wales. They would be wise to reject a party machine devoid of political scruples. Hopefully, given the implosion of One Nation in Queensland in recent weeks, they can deliver a further rebuff by ensuring that David Oldfield is not given a platform for his divisive brand of politics through a seat in the New South Wales Upper House.

My re-election to this place was achieved through the combined efforts of a vital and committed Labor Party and through the broad-based support of ordinary working men and women. I thank everyone who voted Labor. Although it is always difficult to single out individuals or even groups for recognition, I would be remiss if I did not record my appreciation to the following people.

The people of Yarrabah once again gave my campaign magnificent support. My connection with this community goes back over 30 years, when I was first posted there as a young teacher. I recommit myself to furthering the process of reconciliation and to achieving a better standard of living for all indigenous Australians. In a pathetic example of dummy spitting, the National Party tried to use the media to attack the value of the vote from Yarrabah through some intemperate and untrue statements by the now deposed shadow Minister for Police and Corrective Services. Similarly, former One Nation voters who spurned the coalition and turned to Labor with their second preferences were branded as traitors by the National Party's candidate. The Leader of the Opposition was quick to shoot from the lip, launching a similar attack on former coalition voters who had turned to One Nation.

It is a role of political parties to present worthwhile and attractive policies to the electorate for its consideration, not to berate voters for exercising their democratic right. I thank these people for their support and can assure them that the issues they raised with me when doorknocking will be addressed to the best of my ability. I thank also those workers and primary producers in the sugar industry who offered their support to my campaign. This was done in recognition of the commitment made by Labor to meeting the crisis caused by the continued decline in c.c.s. levels, falling world prices and tariff removal by an uncaring and out of touch Government in Canberra.

Unfortunately, this State's brief political flirtation with One Nation has sent a wrong message to our neighbours and, indeed, the rest of the world. Australia is not a racist or bigoted society. We are fundamentally a diverse and tolerant people who accept each other for what we are. We do not discriminate on the basis of the colour of our skin, our religious beliefs, our sexual preferences or any other measure based on qualities other than our intrinsic fundamental human worth. The Australia of which I am proud is also proud of its independence. We should acknowledge and take pride in our ancient and indigenous history, as well as contributions made over the past 200 years by newer arrivals. I look forward to the new millennium and the rebirth of our nation as a truly independent republic taking its place as a full equal on the international stage.

During the campaign the Green Party made much of the impact that it would have on the outcome of the Mulgrave by-election. Its vote was low. Most environmentalists chose instead to cast their vote directly for Labor, based on its sound environmental record. Genuine environmentalists remembered the shameful role played by the Greens during the 1995 election campaign, when they helped to bring the Nationals to power by putting political expediency ahead of their principles. I believe strongly in protecting our wonderful natural environment. I fully understand also the need for environmentally sustainable development. The Greens do not have a monopoly on concern for the environment, nor do they have the right of veto over sustainable projects that have the capacity to create employment opportunities for Queenslanders.

During the election campaign a number of commitments were given to the electors of Mulgrave, and today I reaffirm my determination to see them all delivered in full and on time. For most of my adult life I have had the privilege of being involved in the education of our young people. I am very proud that when representing Mulgrave on a previous occasion I facilitated the setting aside of land at Edmonton to cater for the establishment of an education precinct. In this term I intend to build upon that achievement. In 1998 the Bentley Park Primary School and Preschool opened their doors on a sizeable parcel of land acquired by the then Goss Government. My commitment to education is as strong as ever.

The Minister for Education announced during the by-election that construction of the Bentley Park State High School would commence this financial year, with its first intake of students to be taken at the commencement of the 2000 school year. The construction of this much needed facility is on track, with earthworks starting this month. The Bentley Park campus offers the opportunity to establish a superb facility to cater for the educational needs of the whole community with the emphasis on lifelong learning. It is my intention to work closely with educators, the community and the Cairns City Council to maximise the opportunities shared usage of facilities can provide.

In 1994 I first raised the prospect of closing off Trinity Inlet to commercial gill netting. It was therefore with a sense of great satisfaction that this project became Labor policy and was presented to the people at both the June general election and then again at the by-election. Trinity Inlet is a precious and finite resource and I commend the work done under the Trinity Inlet Management Plan to preserve and utilise this valuable marine ecosystem. Continued commercial gill netting was having a deleterious effect on recreational and tourist fishing opportunities.

The Minister for Primaries Industries has acted promptly to institute a regulatory impact statement and the necessary processes are in train to achieve the commitments to the electors of Mulgrave. In future years, with careful management Trinity Inlet will become a focal point for locals and will provide recreational opportunities for tourists. In economic terms, the return to the far northern community through this use will far outweigh that received by way of commercial fishing.

It has come to my attention that there is a need to upgrade the boat ramp at Thompson Road, Edmonton. Under the previous coalition Government substantial funds were set aside for the establishment of a pontoon in the vicinity. This dubious offer was not sought by the community, nor was it a practical proposition in the first place as the water in that area is far too shallow to support the use of a pontoon. It remains a mystery as to why such an announcement was ever made. Public calls by myself for a "please explain" fell on deaf ears.

I have had recent discussions with the Edmonton fishing club and they inform me that Queensland Transport has indicated the funds are still available to be put to the more practical purpose of constructing the boat ramp. It is therefore my intention to ensure that the construction of the new boat ramp becomes a reality. Such a facility will be of great benefit, as the current ramp is in a poor state of repair and cannot cope adequately with current, let alone projected, demand.

During my earlier terms as member for Mulgrave, the provision of services and facilities to keep pace with the rapid urbanisation of the southern suburbs of Cairns was a top priority. This remains the case now more than ever. Land for road improvements and the sites for schools, ambulance and fire stations and community health centres were allocated as part of a whole of community approach to provision of infrastructure. The planning was done and it must now be implemented.

The former coalition Government let the people of Mulgrave down in its two and a bit years in office. It boasted it would establish a 24-hour police station in the Edmonton area. It never did. It was all talk and no action, which is typical of its approach to law and order issues. The coalition never got around to fulfilling this promise. It considered window shopping at real estate agencies for a site on caneland between Edmonton and Gordonvale as a substitute for real action.

A facility remote from the population hub would have been unsatisfactory. Had the previous Government ever followed through on this misguided plan, the community would have been short-changed. Furthermore, it would have resulted in the downgrading of both the Edmonton and Gordonvale Police Stations. This would have diminished the visible police presence in those urban areas where it is really needed. The Minister for Police has announced that the construction of a new 24-hour police station will commence as a redevelopment of the current Edmonton site in the new financial year. Community support for this initiative is high as we look forward to having this station up and running with a complement of 18 to 20 officers early in 2000.

During the by-election the National Party candidate falsely claimed the ambulance station at Edmonton would be downgraded. This was in contradiction to a commitment made by myself that, in fact, an upgrading would occur to accommodate growth demand. The Minister for Emergency Services backed my commitment and events of recent weeks bear out the veracity of that commitment. The upgrading of the ambulance station in Edmonton to a full 24-hour service will be achieved over the next few weeks. I thank the Minister for her prompt action and pass on to her the appreciation of my constituents, especially those seniors who under Labor have now been provided with free universal ambulance cover.

When previously in office, I negotiated a five-year program of upgrading works along Yarrabah Road to improve safety for the residents of that community and the community of East Trinity. Although some work was carried out during my term in office, the previous coalition Government obviously had priorities elsewhere and the program slipped seriously behind the timetable that had been established. I am pleased to assure those affected constituents that the elements of that program are now back on

track and it is my determination to see the completion of the bulk of the work within my current term of office.

The community of Babinda has over the last 20 years suffered a gradual decline and mistakes have been made in withdrawing essential services. There is, however, a new-found sense of purpose within the township. The establishment of the Babinda Community Association will supplement the good work being done by a number of organisations as the community sets about reinvigorating itself. This process was given a real boost when the Minister for Housing gave the go-ahead for the Abbeyfield project, which will see many of Babinda's older citizens attain independent living within the community and not be faced with the prospect of having to move elsewhere.

Within the next few weeks a Queensland Government Agent Program office will open in Babinda, giving residents access to an enhanced range of Government services, all available within the town itself. The Minister for Health has announced funding for the upgrading of the Babinda Hospital to better accommodate the needs of those requiring aged care.

I wish to reaffirm my support for some of the excellent work being done in the Innisfail district. That community is currently raising funds for the establishment of haemodialysis facilities in the city. Innisfail district citizens should not have to constantly travel to Cairns for this important service. It is my intention to address this issue in more detail in this place at another time.

I now turn to issues which have brought great pain to working men and women in Queensland, as they have throughout the nation. Ideologically driven attacks on the foundations of a sound and workable industrial relations system by conservative Governments at both State and Federal levels have reduced employee confidence to unprecedented lows. The restructuring of the industrial relations model has not produced the efficiencies projected. Improved productivity levels are not to be sustained through cut-throat competition between workers. Evidence suggests that a sense of collective wellbeing provides better incentives for the work force to strive for higher output. Secretive workplace agreements foster unproductive workplace division wherein the individual is too busy protecting his or her own job to make any contribution of worth to the enterprise. They do not foster the enterprise commitment so valuable in a finely balanced free market economy.

Enlightened employers to whom I speak are rejecting the individualisation of industrial bargaining. They accept that a return to the collective process under the umbrella of an Industrial Relations Commission skilled in fairly resolving industrial disputation will provide a win-win situation for worker and boss alike. It is a fact that industrial disputes occur. An effective industrial relations system provides workable mechanisms for resolving conflicts efficiently and, more importantly, fairly. The coalition's inflammatory approach to industrial relations only foments discontent.

The casualisation of the Australian work force to unprecedented levels has been a social disaster. The resulting dislocation has destabilised the work force to the extent that families have great difficulty in planning and working towards the realisation of such things as home ownership.

Government at all levels has been guilty of using economic theory to shed its social responsibilities in the name of economic rationalism. The fundamentals of National Competition Policy are quite sound, but unfortunately public management has seized upon NCP as a means of downsizing, privatising and contracting out in order to improve the bottom line without any thought as to the impact upon the lives of ordinary people. The bottom line should not just be measured in terms of dollars saved. Economic efficiency is a worthwhile aim, but not at the expense of our social fabric. It is false economy to save a dollar on wages, yet spend more on social welfare as a growing number of valuable employees are consigned to the scrap heap of unemployment or underemployment.

We owe it to the citizens of this State to spend their taxes wisely, but to balance fiscal propriety with a genuine commitment to the welfare of the community. This is done through the provision of services in our schools and our hospitals; by our ambulance, police and fire and rescue services; and through the provision of affordable electricity, water and public transport. The business of Labor Governments is to deliver community services, not to replicate the corporate sector, but to work with it to create jobs and a better standard of living for all.

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