



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

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CORPORATIONS LAW

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (8.42 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Nicklin. If there is a chance for CCA to give NCP a good kicking, we will take it. Community dissatisfaction, disenchantment and inconvenience are now a fact of life. This is a new and unwanted public emotion that has not had to be dealt with in years gone by. Every day, and generally several times per day, we are advised of instances where the public has received a mauling at the hands of the banking cartels, the supermarket monopolies and privatised or partly privatised Government owned corporations. In this day and age of mad economic rationalism where the only consideration is the mighty dollar, people are becoming the victims rather than the customers.

In most cases, the people most hurt by the heartlessness of the modern-day corporate environment are the very people who are least able to cope with such harsh treatment and such inconvenience. I refer to the elderly in our community who have been loyal to, say, a particular bank all their life and are now being rewarded for their lifetime of loyalty with the local branch of their bank withdrawn. Many of these people have trouble coping with the latest whiz-bang technology. They do not want to have to do their banking at an automatic teller or on the Internet or over the phone, where they do not know who they are talking to and they have to go through myriad button pressing to speak to anybody. With spiralling bank charges, these people deserve and should be able to expect a decent level of service. I know that that is not what the people in the community and the community organisations of Kilcoy expected, but what they got was the closure of the Commonwealth Bank.

Dr Prenzler: And in Laidley.

Mr FELDMAN: Yes, and in Laidley. It is tragic to see small communities wither and die, and it is not just about a company and an individual client. Whole communities and an established way of life are being torn asunder throughout Australia even as we speak. Banks amalgamate, rationalise and withdraw services and a small town loses a few bank employees. The town could be losing the president of the Apex Club, the secretary of Rotary or the treasurer of the local cricket club. The bank employees' children are withdrawn from the small school causing the loss of a teacher, and the whole tragic cycle starts over again.

Dr Prenzler interjected.

Mr FELDMAN: Yes, local businesses lose as well. The same process has occurred with the same results as predatory supermarkets have gobbled up family-owned grocery businesses and the local butcher shops. Decreased job opportunities and decreased customer services are the price we pay for increased corporate profits. No-one denies the right of the shareholder to expect a return on their shareholding. What must be borne in mind, though, is that the corporations are depriving their profits from the communities and there must always be a balance that ensures the community receives an acceptable level of service in return.

Normally the balance is achieved by competition among the service providers, but it is quite ironic that the much-vaunted National Competition Policy spurned from the mind of Mr Fred Hilmer is in fact delivering the opposite. The formation of monopolies, oligopolies and cartels is tilting the balance against the customer. It is now absolutely essential that we retain the balance by legislation, because that is the only way that it can be forced to be done. It will be pretty hard to create competition when there is only one bank and one store. It could be exactly like the old song says—

"I load 16 tonnes and what do I get
Just another day older and deeper in debt
St Peter don't you call me because I can't go
I owe my soul to the company store."

That could be the song of the new century.

Corporations benefit from communities. I believe that it is eminently reasonable to expect that they should be required to subject their operations to a meaningful community benefits test. Just as citizens do, and perhaps even more, corporations have a social responsibility. It is not unreasonable to expect corporations to be good corporate citizens. It is certainly not unreasonable for consumers to be assured of a reasonable level of service and to have that assurance enshrined in legislation. I commend the member for Nicklin for bringing this motion to the Parliament for discussion. I commend the motion to the House.
