



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 4 October 2000

MINERAL RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (8.45 p.m.): It gives me pleasure to rise in support of this Bill as proposed by the honourable member for Gladstone, who at all times in this House leads by example. Her aim when reviewing legislation and its effects on the people of this State is obviously to be fair, just and honest while at the same time putting the interests of her constituents to the fore.

In pursuing those aims, the intent of this Mineral Resources Bill is to address what appears to be an inequitable endowment of power to a specific group of people, namely, Aboriginal Queenslanders, while excluding a complementary group of people, namely, other Queensland leaseholders. The member for Gladstone addressed one concern I had in relation to the term "owner" not being defined clearly. However, in her speech of 20 July 1999 she clarified that with advice that she had received that related to section 5 of the Mineral Resources Act 1989, which defines an owner as a person who holds land from the State under an Act other than an Act about mining or petroleum under certain kinds of leases or occupancies other than occupation rights under a permit under the Land Act 1994. This definition covers pastoral leases and thus it is unnecessary in the draft to define what is meant by "owner".

During the debate on this Bill in the previous sittings of this Parliament I heard many times members on the Government side of the House state that members who support this Bill are anti-mining and that negotiations resulting from this Bill between landowners and mining companies will cause untold nightmares for mining companies in the future. I think members will find that at the present time mining companies are already suffering delays and nightmares whilst negotiating mining leases under native title. Also during the debate on this Bill in the previous sittings of this House I believe it was stated by a member that there was a backlog of at least 1,200 mining tenures waiting for some sort of workable outcome.

The member for Kallangur stated that this was a populist Bill—everybody likes to believe that they are equal on this earth and, if not born with a silver spoon in their mouth, that they at least have the right to equal opportunity in trying to obtain one for themselves. There is nothing wrong with a populist Bill if it is designed to bring a balance to a one-sided argument. I think I also heard it argued that this was a simplistic Bill. Perhaps it is, but in my experience it is more often than not the simplistic ideas that work. Too many times the intent of good ideas are lost in the complexities of legislation that make them unworkable, as in Mabo.

One must ask the question: why is it lawful for one group of people to negotiate and not for another? Why can one group of people be subject to total disruption of their daily existence without due compensation whilst another group can negotiate and receive compensation? It is divisive policies and laws that create the tensions that split nations. Instead of uniting the people of this great nation, legislation is passed to accentuate differences and divide us.

When two people travel life's road and one is constantly being given financial assistance and the other one is not, then there is bound to be resentment. They may both be white, they both be black, or one may be black and one may be white. The colour of one's skin does not matter because a perceived unfairness always breeds resentment in the party who feels that they are being dealt with unequally.

Therefore, it is unfair to suggest that the person who feels resentment must automatically be racist. Racism does exist and perhaps, as some members have stated, is growing—growing not because people are born racist, as all children play happily together oblivious to differences, but because as they grow they are educated to be so by this system which breeds resentment.

At times this debate has been steered off course and some honourable members have endeavoured to make out that those who support the Bill are in some way anti-mining or anti-Aboriginal. Both are far from the truth. This Bill is addressing a perceived injustice against one section of land-holders. Recently, in the main street of Kingaroy an Aboriginal man asked me, "With all the many millions of dollars that ATSIC has received, why aren't I a millionaire? Why aren't I living in a mansion? If you do the sums as to the dollars per head, I—an Aboriginal—should be a millionaire. Why aren't I?" He spoke of nepotism, corruption, greed, misappropriation and mismanagement—all of the things that each and every one of us complains about—in Government, Government departments, industry and society in general. His final statement to me was, "Why don't you whites kick up a stink?" We discussed it for a little while and we agreed that the fear of being labelled a racist was the main reason, and he laughed.

What Governments, Aboriginal leaders and the various do-good groups need to realise is that there is a growing resentment of a perceived anti-white sentiment. More often than not this sentiment is pushed by whites themselves and a resultant reverse discrimination exists. Too often resentment of the unequal treatment of two Australians in identical situations is taken as racism if one is coloured, instead of the honest reaction, namely, that it is resentment. To judge it as racist is unfair. How often do we see resentment in the work force when a male receives a higher wage than a woman when both perform the same function? How hard we women have fought for that equality in those situations. It is the same for students in schools, patients in hospitals and people waiting in dental clinics. When two people need a service and one is given priority due to colour alone, that surely is racial discrimination.

I personally resent people pushing in on a line and jumping the queue, and most people react in the same way—with a bit of agitation. It is only when one party is other than white that the race card is played. It is definitely incorrect to call this resentment racism. These groups must realise that what all Australians want no matter their skin colour is the opportunity to grab opportunities in life as they come along. As with all people, what we make of our lives and what we do with opportunities is up to us.

This Bill is not intended, as the member for Gladstone has stated, to confer on non-Aboriginal landowners greater rights in relation to consultation, mediation or negotiation, but it does aim to ensure that non-Aboriginal landowners have no lesser rights for consultation, mediation or negotiation. What this Bill aims to achieve is a simplistic equality. It is with the intended purpose of this legislation in mind that I commend the Bill to the House.
