



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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SUSPENSION OF MEMBERS

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (9.35 a.m.): I will take a moment to speak to this motion. I would like to explain a few things. When I wake up in the morning and look out my bedroom window, I look straight out on to a dairy farm and a dairy shed. I was born here in Brisbane but very soon afterwards moved out into rural Queensland. I lived in towns such as Chinchilla and Malanda.

Another member of this Parliament also lived on the Atherton Tableland. He lived in the town of Atherton and he would certainly know the town of Malanda quite well. I am sure that deep down, in his heart of hearts, that other member of this Parliament, regardless of his politics, would understand exactly why I did what I did yesterday. I am sure that he knows exactly what is on the main street of Malanda—a gigantic milk factory. That milk factory is the centre of the town and it provides employment for about 135 people. It provides an outlet for about 196 dairy farmers.

I have been a member of Parliament for only two years, but I have been interested in politics for quite some time. One of the reasons I got into politics was to try to make a change, to try to do something good and try to represent people who, as far as I am concerned, had gone without representation for quite some time—including me.

I understand why some members of the House do not want to hear what I have to say, and that is fair enough. Ultimately, I do not really care what happens to me. That is not my concern. My concern is about what will happen to the 60-odd people I sat down and had tea and coffee with not more than a few months ago. They said to me, "Shaun, we accept that there are global markets. We accept that there is change. We accept that we are not a part of the rationale any more. We accept that National Competition Policy is happening."

Recently in Mareeba I attended a meeting which the Deputy Prime Minister also attended. He came up and tried to speak to growers in Mareeba. I think I was the only member of this Parliament at that meeting. About 600 growers attended to vent their anger at the Deputy Prime Minister. The speech made by the member for Crows Nest last night was in direct and stark contrast to the speech made by the Deputy Prime Minister in Mareeba. It was like listening to people from two separate parties. It is absolutely amazing. It shows me at least one thing—I suppose I have learned this in the last couple of months more than ever before—and that is that politics is not so much about what you do; it is about what you say. A lot of members of this House will do one thing and say another.

Regardless of what happens here today, regardless of what has been said in the media and regardless of what will be said in the media, it is my profound wish that every other member of this Parliament would do exactly the same thing for their constituents if the need arose. Other members of this Parliament have done similar things—maybe not exactly the same thing. I have the utmost respect for any members of Parliament who are willing to put their heads on the chopping block for their constituents. It should probably happen a lot more, regardless of the manner in which it is done. Yes, as the Leader of the Opposition said, we are elected to this House to debate the issue, but when the issue is beyond debate, when the issue is sunk and finished, we must do whatever we possibly can to get the message across.

When that protest was under way at the front of Parliament House, the Premier refused point blank to come out and speak to the protesters. Yes, he accepted a delegation, but there were a thousand-odd people out there who had come a long way to see the Premier. They would have given

him a hearing. They were quiet when other members of Parliament got up and spoke. They would have let the Premier speak. It hurt me personally to think that the Leader of this State—he has said on numerous occasions in this Chamber that he is the leader for all Queenslanders—would not come out and speak to the protesters. That is all they wanted. They wanted to hear from the Premier. They know that deregulation is inevitable. They know that Queensland is probably very ill-equipped to stand up against the Victorians and stand up against the Federal Parliament, and they realise that we live in a federation and that we cannot stop cross-border trade. But at the very least, the Premier of this State—the Leader of this State—could have gone out and spoken to them. The main reason I did what I did the other day was because that was not going to happen, and I knew that was not going to happen. I thought that the very least I could do was to take it on my shoulders, as a person who represents a large number of dairy farmers, to do something.

I spent a little bit of time last night reading through the Hansards from 1988, 1989 and 1990. I read the speeches made at that time by a few members who are now sitting in ministerial positions. I heard some of the frustration and anger in their speeches at that time. They knew that what was happening was wrong. They knew that they were in a position where they had to wait for the next election for something to happen. I read some of the speeches made by members who are now sitting on the Government benches. I also looked back through a few records and I discovered people who, at one stage in their lives, understood exactly what I did the other day. They may say differently and think differently now, but back in those days there were a few members of this Parliament who perhaps had a little bit less responsibility and they could actually fight the good fight.

The problem in Parliaments—not just this Parliament, not just in the Federal Parliament and not just in Australia—is that a lot of people have forgotten to fight. They have forgotten what the fight is about. I do not know whether any members saw young Ian Thorpe on the TV this morning, but he said it quite clearly: it is not about whether you win or lose; it is how you fight. I will admit straightaway—and I have not tried to do anything else—that what I did was unparliamentary. A parliamentary thing to do would have been to make a speech in this place. But what would that speech have achieved? Would it have changed the vote of any single Government member?

Mr Bredhauer: What did you achieve?

Mr NELSON: I will tell the Minister what I achieved and I will tell him what will be happening in Malanda when I go home tonight. I have received around 200 messages of support from people at home, and they have all said, "Shaun, you probably went a bit too far, but at least you did it. At least you had a go. At least you fought." These people realise they are up against bigger things, they realise that the fight is probably lost, but they respect the fact that you have a go—no matter what, that you have a go.

I realise that the Dairy Deregulation Implementation Bill will be debated while I am not here, and I realise that the punishment was set to fit that, but the simple fact is that I have made my stand. I have said more with my protest than I could say in a thousand words in a debate. At least the member for Barambah and I were willing to put our necks on the line, knowing full well that we would get into trouble for doing so, but at least we had a go. At least we went out there and fought the good fight, did the utmost that we could possibly do to send a message not just to this Parliament but to the Federal Parliament and to the Victorians. Members may have noticed that, the very next day, there were protests outside the Parliament in New South Wales, and there is—rightfully so—a protest out the front of this place. It seems to me that people are queuing up to protest in Queensland. They have to book space on George Street to come and protest!

Mr Bredhauer: That's because we made it legal.

Mr NELSON: Exactly. As I said, I read the speeches in which Government members were fighting to make it legal. I know the history of that time quite well. I was in Grade 12 when it was all happening.

Government members interjected.

Mr NELSON: I finished Grade 12 in 1990. I was reading the speeches of that time, and I know that many Government members did fight a hell of a lot harder back then. I know the politics of this situation now, and what has to be done has to be done, and I accept that. That is politics. It is part of the reason I do not like politics, and the sooner we get the politicians out of politics, the better.

To return to my point—I live in a small town that many members have visited. It has about 196 dairy farmers plotted all around it. Dairy farming has been the major source of income in that town for almost a century. Unfortunately, no matter what is said in this Parliament, no matter what is said in the Federal Parliament, no matter what the soothsayers who postulate National Competition Policy say, it is a town that will suffer dramatically from the effects of dairy industry deregulation. On my best estimates and on the best estimates of people who know a little bit more about economics than I do, it is a town that will lose around 60 dairy farmers from its base industry, and that will be utterly devastating for my

home town, the town that I want to live in, the town that I want to be buried in eventually, 60 or 70 years from now, after you guys are long gone.

The simple fact is that it is a small town, and it will feel the flow-on effect of those 60 lost dairy farmers. There have already been jobs lost from the Malanda milk factory.

Mr Reynolds: Was this not just a publicity stunt on your part?

Mr NELSON: The member for Townsville asked me whether this was a publicity stunt. This is the difference between me and him. He forgets that he supported a north Queensland State 12 years ago but now does not.

Honourable members: Ha, ha!

Mr NELSON: Members should read the Townsville Bulletin. It is there. I know; I read the Townsville Bulletin. Unlike the member for Townsville, I am not blatantly money hungry and seeking re-election. I am not chasing party pre-selection all the time. If I do not get elected at the next election, that is the will of the people, and I accept that and that is fine. If I do get elected at the next election, I will continue to do what I do and fight the best fight I can fight. That is up to the people. I accept democracy, unlike other people in this Chamber. Unlike the member for Townsville, no, it was not a publicity stunt. I did what I did because the farmers out there voted for me to do it. They said, "Shaun, if that is what is going to happen, then do it", and I did it.

Mr Speaker, I will tell you quite clearly: I am sorry that I was not parliamentary in my behaviour when I did it. I am very sorry for that. It was a very unparliamentary thing to do. But I do not regret what I did, and I certainly would do it again, simply because I will never, ever rest until the message of these people is heard. The message may not be acted upon, but at least it will be heard, and that is the point ultimately. The words in this House are not always heard. I will give newcomers a bit of a hint: not everyone in Malanda reads Hansard. Not everyone in Malanda has a copy of Hansard delivered to their front door every night. A lot of the words that are said in this place do not get heard outside. Those two things down the end are the main way people get their news, believe it or not, and a lot of people do not sit down and read every word that is printed in Hansard. As I said, I have received a ton of support over the last couple of nights saying, "Good on you, Shaun, for what you have done", and every single one of the people who has said that has also said, "At least you fought. It doesn't matter what happens from here. Okay, you are going to get kicked out for a little while, but at least you said what you had to say by doing that. At least the protest was made."

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr NELSON: The member for Callide should be very quiet. I have not attacked his boys yet, but I certainly could. I will not do so. The member for Callide was out the front there—

A Government member interjected.

Mr NELSON: Well, no, because I have a little bit more respect than that and I will not say a word more on that.

The simple fact is that the small town I come from will suffer really badly as a result of this. I have to walk up and down the main street of Malanda. I do so on the weekend to go and get a loaf of bread or just to go and see some people or to go and get a video from the shop. I can walk down that street tonight and for the next couple of weeks with my head held high and very, very proud because of the reaction I have received from that town. I know that, in 40 or 50 years' time, when I am talking to my grandchildren—if I ever manage to find myself a girlfriend—

A City Country Alliance member interjected.

Mr NELSON: And keep her. In 40 years' time, when I am talking to my grandchildren, I will be able to say that I fought the good fight; I did what I could; I did not go quietly; I did not roll over like a mouse and play silly games. I fought the way every other Australian would fight in that situation, the way I know that many other members of this Parliament would have liked to have fought if they were not shackled to a party that told them they could not.

Ultimately, in my heart, I know that when I am sitting in my rocking chair on the veranda in 40 or 50 years' time, remembering the many faces that have passed on since then, I will be able to say to my grandchildren, "When I had my time to have a say, I did it loudly and strongly. I did not shy away from the fight when I had to fight." I know that there are a couple of members opposite who would have done exactly the same thing if coalminers were going to be put out of work, or if a member of a railway union was going to be tossed out of his job. I know that there are members of the National Party who would have done exactly the same thing as I did. There are also a couple of guys up the back here who would do the same thing.

In closing, I did what I did because I come from a little tiny dairy town—a town that is going to lose a lot of jobs. That town will lose a lot of people. A lot of faces will change. Another member of this Parliament comes from Atherton and he would know exactly what I am talking about when I say that

there are a lot of good people in that area. Regardless of their politics, they are good and decent people. I am only a young fellow, and they have sat me down and said, "Shaun, listen! This is what is going to happen to me. This is the end product." It is really sad, because not only are they characters who will be lost to Malanda and Queensland; they also belong to a generation that will be lost to this country.

This country used to be great. It used to be an incredible place which turned out people who could do incredible things. I will admit that I do not understand what has happened in the last 10 or 15 years. One could say that it is all because of National Competition Policy. One could say that it is because of one thing or another. I do not blame the Labor Party. I do not blame the National Party. I do not know who to blame. I do not know who did this thing to us.

Maybe we did it ourselves. Maybe it was the Australians who were talking to me who did it. The simple fact is that I have had my say and I have done my bit. I fought as well as I could. I did my duty to the best of my ability. The people at home know that and I have gained their support. No matter what is said in this place, there is only one poll that counts, and that is the one at the next election. I will accept the decision of my electorate. However, I do not accept the right of the Brisbane media to say whatever it wants to say. I do not accept the right of people in this city to say whatever they want to say.

There are only 30,000-odd people that I care about, and they are the people who live on the Atherton Tableland. Before I sit down to face my day, I issue this dire warning to all the people who live in and around the Brisbane City area: when they are paying \$3 or \$4 a litre for milk in the next five or six years, they should not come whingeing to me.
