



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 16 October 2001

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Hon. W. A. M. Gunn, AM; Hon. Sir W. E. Knox, KTB, KStJ

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.31 a.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

1. That this House desires to place on record its appreciation of the services rendered to this state by the late William Angus Manson Gunn, a former member of the parliament of Queensland, Deputy Premier and minister of the Crown, and the late Sir William Edward Knox, former member of the parliament of Queensland, Deputy Premier and minister of the Crown.
2. That Mr Speaker be requested to convey to the families of the deceased gentlemen the above resolution, together with an expression of the sympathy and sorrow of the members of the parliament of Queensland in the loss they have sustained.

Before I speak about Bill Gunn, I wish to acknowledge the fact that Mrs Lorna Gunn is in the Speaker's Gallery today. I know that she spoke to the Minister for Public Works, who helped to facilitate that. On behalf of all members, I say that we are delighted that you are able to join us today on this very sad occasion. Lorna, we wish you, your children and grandchildren well. We know this is a difficult time for you and we wish you all the best.

All Queenslanders are forever in the debt of Bill Gunn. If it had not been for the courage and determination of Bill to do the right thing, we would never have had the Fitzgerald inquiry to end corruption in Queensland. It was the two-year Fitzgerald inquiry which ended decades of deeply entrenched corruption in Queensland's political system, police and some areas of government. The inquiry did far more than merely put an end to endemic corruption. It set in motion a new era of accountable government, pride in being a police officer, mechanisms whereby people could appeal against decisions which had once been final, and—in all but five electorates—state elections in which the votes of all Queenslanders carry the same weight. That led to a fair electoral system. Queensland now has the most accountable mechanisms and government systems in the world—and, indeed, in the history of this state.

It meant that companies could do business with government knowing that the best tender would win. It meant people could protest without the fear of being beaten. It meant that Queensland became one of the best and fairest democracies in the free world. It meant Queensland truly became the best place in the world in which to live.

Let there be no doubt that we owe this new era of freedom and accountability to the initial work started by Bill Gunn, with the support later on of Mike Ahern. I doubt whether there has ever been a more important, far-reaching and courageous decision made by a Queensland government minister than that made in the fight against corruption by Bill Gunn in May 1987.

It is also important to realise that Bill knew the size of the explosion he was setting off, and the effect it would have on the National Party government. It was this knowledge which made the decision all the more courageous, because Bill was born and bred on the Country Party philosophy of honesty.

He was born in Laidley on 22 June 1920 and educated at local state schools. Apart from serving as a member of the First Cavalry Mobile Veterinary Service in the Second World War, he continued to live in the Laidley area where he was a grazier. In 1966, Bill entered local politics as a councillor with the Laidley Shire Council, becoming chairman from 1970 to 1973. He then stepped up to

state parliament, winning Somerset in May 1972, and holding the seat for 20 years, until his retirement in 1992.

In his maiden speech to the Legislative Assembly on 14 September 1972, Bill noted—

In many areas the local Council is the main employer of labour, and the families whose breadwinners are employed by the Council are assisting to keep many small towns alive ... I contend that if we want people to stay in the country we must provide them with the amenities that are enjoyed by city people.

I think we all say 'hear, hear' to that.

Bill was Deputy Premier from 1983 to 1989, Minister for Education from 1980 to 1982, Minister for Commerce and Industry from 1982 to 1983, Minister Assisting the Treasurer from 1983 to 1987, Minister for Police from 1986 to 1989, Minister for Public Works, Main Roads and Expo from 1987 to 1989, Minister for Housing in 1989, and Minister for Finance and Local Government in 1989. He had very broad ministerial experience. He certainly served the state well.

During his term in office, Bill served also as my Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee—the first Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee. He served also as a member of the Standing Orders Committee and was the Temporary Chairman of Committees. In 1975 and 1985, Bill served as the Queensland delegate at the Australian Constitutional Convention.

However, it was Bill's appointment as Police Minister that resulted in his becoming aware of a considerable volume of evidence of endemic corruption. On the day he became Police Minister, he started collecting documents alleging corruption. His problem was knowing how to deal with the evidence when it was obvious to him that the corruption went right to the top. When the ABC *Four Corners* program 'The Moonlight State' presented fresh corruption allegations, Bill was Acting Premier. Without consulting any of his colleagues, he announced that there would be a commission of inquiry. On 26 May 1987, in a joint media release with Attorney-General Paul Clauson, he announced the appointment of Tony Fitzgerald to head the inquiry. The rest, as they say, is history.

For the record of the parliament, I table the news release issued at that time. There was in fact a joint news release by Bill Gunn and Paul Clauson about the appointment of the inquiry, which I think is important for the record. I table also a later press release from the commission of inquiry itself and to which Bill Gunn had provided material. It stated—

The Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Conduct today declined to comment on the contents of documents which had been supplied to it by the Police Minister, Mr. Gunn.

In other words, he not only established the inquiry; he provided it with information and evidence. I table both of those documents for the information of the House.

In his speech to the Legislative Assembly on 6 July 1989 in response to the tabling of the Fitzgerald inquiry report, Bill noted—

The document which Queensland now has before it not only marks the end of an era in this State, but also sets out a clear, fresh path for the future. It provides the avenue along which we can proceed into the future, but with the benefit of learning from the past—and there is much to learn.

The reform process was then carried on by the Goss government.

In 1999, Bill was awarded the Member of the Order of Australia for service to the parliament of Queensland, to local government through the Laidley Shire Council and to the community. It may well have added, 'And for enabling Queenslanders to enjoy a better way of life.' Bill is survived by his wife, Lorna, five children and 17 grandchildren. On the numerous occasions when I had discussions with him, he certainly expressed a great love for not just his children but also his grandchildren. He loved them very dearly. I extend my sympathy and that of this House to his family. And I say to them, on behalf of all Queenslanders, you can hold your heads high and be proud of what Bill achieved.

As I indicated, Bill was Deputy Chairman of the first Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee on which Robert Schwarten, Wendy Edmond, Margaret Woodgate, Santo Santoro and Neville Harper also served. We were the first members of the committee and we knew him well. We travelled extensively. One of the things that I came to admire about him was his sense of humour.

I can remember one occasion when the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee was investigating that very difficult subject of prostitution. We had to make some recommendations as a result of the Fitzgerald inquiry as to what our position would be. We embarked on a number of interstate meetings and delegations.

I will never forget the time we were in a brothel. It is not the sort of thing you normally admit to in parliament, but I am delighted that all sides of politics were there. We were in a brothel in Perth accompanied by police. We were interviewing the madam. The madam was sitting on a chair across from us and I was sitting with Wendy Edmond, Bill Gunn and Robert Schwarten. I did not realise it at the time but behind us was a nude painting, which I had not seen on arrival. It was causing great mirth for Margaret Woodgate and Neville Harper, who could see the funny side of this. There was a hallway there and, during the discussions, a scantily clad young lady rushed by. Bill Gunn, displaying his dry

sense of humour, said to the madam, 'There can't be any money in this, my dear lady. The poor woman can't afford clothes.' That was Bill Gunn. He had a great sense of humour.

As Lorna knows, I had the opportunity to interview Bill for my Master of Arts thesis on the CJC and the Fitzgerald inquiry. There is no doubt: anyone who spent some time interviewing Bill will know that he was committed to what he did, he believed in what he did, he took the pain for what he did, but Queensland is a better place for what he did. Lorna, you have the sympathy of all of us. We wish you and the family well.

I now move on to Sir William Knox. Sir William Knox was born in Kew in Victoria on 14 December 1927. Sir William was educated in Melbourne. In 1953, Sir William became the State President of the Queensland Young Liberals and held the position until 1956. Sir William's party activity was varied and included serving as a member of the Federal Council from 1953 to 1957; State Vice-President from 1956 to 1957; member of the State Executive from 1953 to 1956, 1960 to 1964 and 1971 to 1978; and member of the Federal Council from 1976 to 1978.

Sir William won the seat of Nundah in the state election on 3 August 1957, and he held this seat for 32 years—until 1989. In fact, he held it for the whole time that the Labor Party was out of office—for those 32 years. In his maiden speech to the Legislative Assembly on 5 September 1957, Sir William noted—

The future of the trade union movement, if it is to remain free and if it is to function for the good of the rank and file member, lies in cooperation and goodwill between itself and management.

If wages are to be increased and if working hours are to be shortened, production per man hour must be increased. If these things can be done—and they should be done—the status of the working man will be improved immeasurably.

We believe that whilst we are the Government it is one of our jobs to see that the working man gets his full due and that his status is improved.

The sentiments expressed by Sir William in his maiden speech are echoed in the policies of my government.

Sir William was Leader of the Liberal Party from 1976 to 1978 and from 1983 to 1988, Deputy Premier from 1976 to 1978, Minister for Transport from 1965 to 1971, Minister for Justice and Attorney-General from 1971 to 1976, Treasurer from 1976 to 1978, Minister for Health from 1978 to 1980, and Minister for Employment and Labour Relations from 1980 to 1983.

During his term in office, Sir William served as the secretary of the Joint Government Parties, a delegate to the General Conference Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Jamaica and to the Australian Constitutional Conventions and was the leader of a parliamentary delegation to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Sir William was known for his deep integrity, sense of fairness and willingness to listen. He was also a fierce advocate for better education for Australia's children. In 1979, Sir William was created a Knight Bachelor.

Sir William was the patron of a number of community organisations, including the Northern Suburbs Rugby League Club, the Nundah Bowling Club, the Nundah Kindergarten Association and the Toombul District Cricket Club. Sir William was a member of the Order of St John of Jerusalem since 1986—as I am—and was created a Knight of St John in 1995. More recently, Sir William was Chairman of the State Council of St John Ambulance and President of the Association of Independent Schools Queensland. Sir William is survived by his wife, Alexia, and four children. I extend my sympathy and that of this House to his family.

Like many people who were involved in politics during the period I knew Sir William, he did believe in the proud Liberal Party tradition. He worked to rebuild the Liberal Party after the decimation, I guess you could say, of the Liberal Party in the 1983 state election. I do not say that in any critical sense but in a factual sense. He worked very hard to rebuild the Liberal Party at that very difficult time. That is why he became leader again in the Liberal Party's hour of need. Indeed, I know that Sir William is well regarded within Liberal Party ranks and circles for taking on the tough job when he was needed.

Many honourable members will remember Sir William as someone who was very committed to charitable work. He used to engage in his yearly swim to raise money for charity, which got not only an enormous amount of publicity but also good publicity for the charity that he supported. I pass on the condolences and best wishes of all members of parliament to his family. We wish them well at this difficult time.
