



Speech by

STEVEN RODGERS

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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FIRST SPEECH

Mr RODGERS (Burdekin—ALP) (2.48 p.m.): In rising for the first time in this House, I express my gratitude to the people of the Burdekin electorate for the confidence they have shown in me. At this early stage in my speech, I have to acknowledge that the backbone of my successful campaign has been my family, especially the devotion and commitment of my wife, Pattie, who put in the long hours with me, stood by me through the smooth and rough of the election campaign, the late-night meetings, the functions, the early morning starts and travelling around the electorate. Whilst doing this during the last 18 months of my election campaign, she also looked after the family and managed the family business. I thank her here publicly on the super effort she put into my campaign to enable me to be standing here today as a member of parliament.

I also acknowledge my children, twins Samantha and Matthew, who showed maturity beyond their age to understand the importance of my campaign. They became involved and wanted to help whenever they could. I also acknowledge my eldest daughter, Michelle, who could not vote for me because she lives in the electorate of Mundingburra. They all contributed to a great Labor victory. To my parents, Gordon and Dell Rodgers, and my father-in-law and mother-in-law, Laurie and Clare Neilsen, I say thanks for all the support and confidence you had in me throughout the campaign.

I also take this opportunity to thank the Burdekin Labor team for helping with this historic victory in the Burdekin—the first, I have been told, since 1957. I acknowledge my campaign manager, Les Murphy, who did the nuts and bolts work keeping things together and making sure that the machinery of the campaign kept running. A special thanks must go also to past Labor candidates for the seat and Ron Nuttall, a life member of the Labor Party, who chaired campaign meetings during the election and helped coordinate the branches in the electorate. I also acknowledge Peter Rehbein, who turned up on the day from Mackay to support me and help me out. On election night, he coordinated the scrutineer's information that came in. His efforts in working out the booth figures and estimating preferences were spot-on. He made a comment to me on election night that, if things kept going the way they were, I could pack my bags for parliament, something I did the Sunday morning after the election.

Thanks also go to Don Wallace and Les Walker, who contributed their support and time to help me in the campaign. I was honoured to have had the support of these former Labor candidates. To all the other people who helped throughout the campaign and on election day from Collinsville—Jumbo, Arch, Trish, Peter, Mick, John and all the rest—your support was truly incredible.

There was also a branch that committed itself full throttle to my campaign in the Bowen area. To Steve, Kris, John, Jill and other supporters, thanks Queens Beach branch. To the branches and supporters from the Townsville area of the electorate—Stuart, Wulguru, Oonoonba, as well as Peter, Lauris, Dave, Les Junior, Les Senior, Cris and Darin and all the others: you are all part of this historic Labor victory in the Burdekin. A special thanks goes to the Metal Workers Union for its solid support and the retired mineworkers from Collinsville who supported me in my campaign.

I now turn to the Burdekin electorate and its voters. Firstly, I say this to the strong Labor voters, the true believers, who kept their faith in the party and me as their candidate: we finally did it. I say this to other people who stood up and changed their voting practice for the first time: it is an honour for me to represent you in this parliament. You will not regret your decision. I am proud to stand here today to represent my electorate, the Burdekin, in the 50th Parliament. The Burdekin electorate is now a diverse

area. No longer is it the Burdekin of old, which was mostly based on the sugar industry which covered the main areas of the electorate between Gumlu and Giru. The new electorate now includes coalmining, sugar, cattle, agriculture, aquaculture, tourism, fishing, small crops and copper and zinc refineries in the Townsville end of the electorate, just to name some of the major industries. The Burdekin's boundaries now extend from Townsville to Bowen and out past Collinsville to the Newlands mine site.

It now gives me pleasure to do what I believe is an important part of my obligation to the community I represent, that is, to promote the area and send a message to the rest of Queensland and Australia that they have not seen an area as diverse and beautiful as the Burdekin region, and they never will unless they visit. The Burdekin region is unique. It has everything to offer those who wish to visit. There are few other regions that can compare to the winterless climate, blue skies and the kilometres of sandy coastline from Bowen to Townsville. Fishing in the region attracts people from all over Australia. They come to fish the networks of creeks and rivers in the Burdekin which provide the best barramundi fishing and the best areas for crabbing and prawning anywhere, something a former member of parliament, Tom Burns, could relate to. Over the years he has visited the area on numerous occasions and done the odd bit of fishing.

One of the best indications of what the fishing is like in the area is the fact that the Burdekin has more boats per head of population than anywhere else in Queensland and possibly Australia. Boating and fishing are pastimes of most residents in the Burdekin. Whilst on the subject of fishing and boats, I have to make reference to the boating facilities. While some of these facilities are in fairly good shape, there are many that have been neglected over the years by different governments. This is one area I will try to improve in my first term in parliament. An upgrade of boating facilities in the area will improve the attraction for tourists to come fishing, generate more income in the community and help emergency services when there is a need to get boats in and out of the water to rescue people.

The Burdekin is also a major attraction for thousands of migrating and native birds. There are about 250 species in the lower Burdekin Valley and along the coastline. The bird species include emu, pelican, swifts, magpie geese, bower birds, Australian tree creepers, mud nest builders, cranes as well as numerous others. The Burdekin provides one of the best natural habitats anywhere in Australia for different species, and that brings me to ecotourism. Cromarty Wetlands has been gaining recognition throughout Australia and the rest of the world as one of the best natural habitats anywhere. If fully developed, it has the potential to attract tourists and researchers because it is one of the most natural habitats anywhere. I have visited the area and been through it. When you enter it, you go back in time. It is a magnificent, natural area and should be well looked after and fully developed to its best potential.

I now turn to the future of the Burdekin. There are concerns over the future of the Bowen-Collinsville region of the electorate. The people in the region are not the type to throw in the towel. They are prepared to always look at ways of improving their community. One example of this is their ability to generate interest in worthy projects. One of these is a project to establish a miners museum at Collinsville, a project I will commit to help progress so it can become a reality. For far too long the struggle of workers throughout Queensland and Australia has not been recognised and the public should have facilities where they can see what it is like in a realistic situation. Projects like the miners museum will help to highlight the hardships they have endured in their work and their struggle for better working conditions. I make this commitment here today on the record that I will work with the community, community groups, the area shire councils and other organisations to progress and improve the region by pushing with the government to help gain projects to rejuvenate the region. In relation to the promotion of tourism, we need projects to improve and upgrade road and rail facilities. I will continue to fight to help provide a better water infrastructure so the area can prosper and encourage various types of development.

I turn now to the heart of the Burdekin electorate, that is, the sugar growing areas of Home Hill, Clare, Brandon, Giru and Ayr, to name just a few. For those who have never been to the Burdekin or seen a cane fire, it is a spectacular sight. When the fire gains momentum, flakes of black ash blow all over the district. This is called Burdekin snow. Unlike snow at the Snowy Mountains, this is black snow. It is loved and loathed by Burdekin residents, especially women. They loathe it. If it gets on your clothes, you will know what it is all about. The carting of cane and its processing at the mills are also sights to see during the crushing season, from June to November. The harvesting of the cane is also a sight to be seen, and I recommend that people come and have a look at it.

Travelling on towards Townsville you will come across a township called Giru. Giru is famous for its international hotel. I will not say much more about it. If people just call in and have a drink they will see for themselves. There is also a relaxing atmosphere in the Alligator Creek area and in the Mount Elliott National Park. Another area of interest is the Australian Institute of Marine Science. On your trip through the Burdekin you can see all of these areas. The Burdekin electorate is a must to see. My parliamentary colleague the Minister for State Development can verify this, as he is a former Burdekinite.

Today also gives me a chance to answer a question that was asked of me during my campaign, namely: what on earth made you want to be a politician? My reply to everyone is simply that I became interested in politics through my apprenticeship as a boilermaker at the Evans Deakin shipyard, which used to be at Kangaroo Point in Brisbane. I served part of my apprenticeship under a tradesman named Bryant Burns, who later became a senator for Queensland.

I became active in the union movement and interested in the Labor Party as an apprentice. I was involved in industrial action taken by 120 apprentices over a pay claim at the shipyards in what was believed to be the first recorded strike by apprentices in Queensland. I can see that a few on the opposition benches are a bit surprised at my bringing this up. I can assure them that the actions were justified to help gain and maintain a fair wage for the apprentices there. I have seen the injustices that have been inflicted on workers and people throughout the years by conservative governments and representatives. I have always—I will continue to do this—stood up and fought for workers' rights and the rights of the people to get a fair go.

I have a strong passion for my party, the Labor Party. I have been a member of the party for 20 years. I believe it is the only political party that represents the whole community and their interests fairly. I have heard people in the Burdekin say that they had beneficial results from having conservative members over the last few decades but, when asked, nobody seems to know any of great note that stand out. I finally said that enough was enough and that it was time to try to do something for the betterment of the whole electorate—something I now have a chance to do.

I intend to visit the outlying centres of the Burdekin electorate and supply a service to the people by going to them and not having them travel to come and see me. For far too long the Burdekin has not had anybody to represent the whole community, which includes the workers and the small businesspeople—something I intend to do. In finishing, I give this undertaking to the people of the Burdekin: I will deliver what is needed, that is, better representation and service for the whole community.
