



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR ROBINA

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE—DEATH OF MR C. J. BENNETT, MP

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (9.47 a.m.): The Liberal Party joins in paying tribute to the colourful and distinguished service to this parliament and the state rendered by the late Colin Bennett. His passing marks yet another severance of the links with one of the most momentous events in the history of Queensland—the great Labor split of 1957. At the time of the split Mr Bennett was Leader of the Opposition in the Brisbane City Council, having served a term as vice-mayor. His council ward covered the state seat held by the Labor Premier, Vince Gair. The split brought about the breaking of many friendships, and that between Colin Bennett and Vince Gair was one of the more spectacular casualties.

In 1960 Colin Bennett was chosen by the Labor Party to oppose Vince Gair in the South Brisbane seat he had held for 28 years. By 1960, Vince Gair was leader of the Queensland Labor Party in this House. Colin Bennett's defeat of Vince Gair marked the beginning of the end of the QLP in state politics and the beginning of a 12-year career which would mark Colin Bennett as one of the most controversial, colourful and effective members in this House. Anyone who reads the *Hansard* of the period will be impressed by the obvious clarity of his speeches and his single-minded determination to expose what he believed to be widespread corruption in the Queensland police force during the 1950s and 1960s.

There can be no dispute that the 1963 National Hotel royal commission, headed by Sir Harry Gibbs, was the result of his campaign. Even though the inquiry rejected most of Colin Bennett's claims, it is worth noting that it took a further 25 years to substantially, if not totally, vindicate his claims. The Fitzgerald inquiry uncovered police corruption that certainly had its genesis in the 1950s and 1960s and involved some of the names Colin Bennett had made allegations against a quarter of a century earlier. In politics vindication can take a long time. I am sure Colin Bennett felt totally vindicated by the revelations of the Fitzgerald inquiry.

The term 'colourful political figure' is often used too loosely, a bit like 'well-known racing identity', but it undoubtedly applies very aptly to Colin Bennett. He was not only a controversial and effective member and an opposition spokesman, but for around 50 years he was one of the leading barristers in this state in the criminal law area. Indeed, he maintained a substantial practice right through his council and parliamentary careers and continued at the bar for years after he left this House in 1972.

The manner of Colin Bennett's parting from the House and the Labor Party reflects the uncertainty and volatility of Queensland politics over many generations. Prior to the 1972 state election there was a major redistribution of electoral boundaries, and the seats of South Brisbane and Norman were effectively amalgamated. In the resulting preselection battle, Colin Bennett lost out to the member for Norman, Mr Fred Bromley, and left parliament at the 1972 state election. However, his involvement in politics was not over and was to take quite a dramatic turn. He resigned from the Labor Party and contested the 1974 state election as the National Party candidate for the neighbouring seat of Kurilpa. He was not successful, and the seat was held for the Liberal Party by Mr Sam Doumany.

Colin Bennett was not only a distinguished member of this House and alderman of the Brisbane City Council; he was also a leading barrister for the best part of 50 years and a respected member of the community. It is appropriate that this House today pays tribute to his service and his colourful career and extends to his widow and family its sympathy at his passing.