



Speech by

LEX BELL, MP

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 4 June 2003

PARLIAMENT OF QUEENSLAND AMENDMENT BILL [No. 2]

Mr BELL (Surfers Paradise—Ind) (11.55 a.m.): I rise to second the amendment moved by the member for Nicklin and, in doing so, say that it gives me little pleasure to stand to speak on this matter. I have great respect for the leader of the Liberals, Mr Bob Quinn, to whom this bill, if passed, would immediately apply. He is competent. He is hard working. He is experienced, having served in cabinet, and he has done a brilliant job in this House in this term of parliament with only three members and very limited resources. That said, however, I must say that I cannot see that the Leader of the Liberal Party is deserving of a pay rise at this time, particularly as now he is a frontbench member of the opposition he is already entitled to an increase by way of a non-accountable allowance of some \$5,500 per annum. As the honourable member for Nicklin said, the position of the Leader of the Liberal Party has now changed materially and it is more than arguable that calls on his time and the responsibility which he now has have diminished rather than increased now that he is deputy leader of the coalition, for he no longer needs to be across all issues as he was formerly, he has the assistance of colleagues and shadow ministers, he is able to share in the resources of the opposition, and he certainly has much greater shared workload and responsibility.

It is obvious to say that I was not here in October 1998 when the select committee came forward with its recommendation. But I must agree that that committee got quite wrong the second leg of its recommendation. I accept the Premier's statement that this bill that he has introduced into this House is intended to fulfil the spirit of that select committee and its report in 1998. But I ask why, in seeking to fulfil that spirit, a number of three members of the House to comply with the second leg has been selected. Why has three been selected? Why has not two been selected or why has not six been selected as the number of members which a party receiving 10 per cent of the vote must have in this House?

It seems to me looking at it as objectively as I can that the selection of three members in the House for the second leg to apply is contrived. It is contrived to accommodate the Liberal Party, which just happens to have three members in this House. It is tailor made for that situation. Yet this is legislation, as the Leader of the Opposition says, that is intended to apply henceforth to all future parties. In that case, why is the magic number of three selected? There is no argument put forth by the Premier or by members of the Labor Party as to why three is selected other than the fact it just happens to accommodate the present Liberal Party.

Therefore, in seconding the amendment moved by the honourable member for Nicklin, I would like to see the matter further debated within the existing parties and also taken out into the electorate. I see that the second leg previously was flawed. I do not want to be party to the passage of legislation which probably has a flaw in its second leg again.

It is very true what is said by the member for Nicklin, that the National Party after the next election could have fewer than 10 members in this House and might receive fewer than 10 per cent of the vote. Today that might seem to be somewhat fanciful, but I think it is an understatement to say that politics is uncertain. It might have been fanciful in 1998 when the select committee came forward to say at that time that the Liberal Party would have three members in this House today. It is unfortunate that this matter has not been able to go to an all-party select committee again for consideration before being voted on in this House. I supported the motion last week of the honourable member for Nicklin and I support his amendment today.

This second leg definition requires further consideration. It could lead to a flawed result. It may be intended in all good faith to reflect the spirit of the select committee of 1998, but in actual fact just as the second leg of that definition of that committee was flawed so, too, I submit, is flawed the second leg of the definition contained in the bill before us today. This is not a party issue. I repeat what was said by my colleague on my immediate right: advancing the salary level of one individual does not enhance the resources of the opposition. I do not begrudge the opposition further resources to perform the task of opposition. To that extent, I do not agree with the honourable member for Nicklin. But I certainly agree with him that this matter should be postponed and I would certainly like to see a conscience vote at a later stage. We do not need to pay salaries for two deputy positions.

This bill, if passed, will embed in concrete a definition of a party for future times. I say: let us give it more thought. Let it be reviewed again by a select committee which has not reviewed the second leg definition before us today, otherwise the matter may come back to haunt us in future parliaments.