



Speech by

## Mr Pat Purcell

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

Hansard Tuesday, 7 August 2007

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### CONDOLENCE MOTION: DEATH OF HON TJ BURNS AO

**Mr PD PURCELL** (Bulimba—ALP) (11.30 am): It is my privilege to rise to support the motion of condolence moved on the passing of Tom Burns. My Bulimba electorate office has a brass plaque that states: 'Lytton Labor Hall, officially opened by Tom Burns MLA, Leader of the Opposition, 12/07/75.' My office is Tom's old office. Tom not only opened the Lytton Labor Hall but also used it as his electorate office up until the redistribution in 1985 at which time my predecessor Ron McLean relocated to that electorate office.

When Ron entered the office he said, 'Tom, this place resembles a Chinese brothel.' The office consisted of two very small rooms: a reception area and Tom's office which had been tastefully decorated with red and black wallpaper. Needless to say, it did not last long with Ron. Who would have thought that Tom Burns was a velvet wallpaper bloke! The wallpaper had Chinese writing all over it, so it must have come about through the influence of his Chinese mates. Perhaps he received mates' rates to have it put up.

Even though it has been over 20 years since Tom's electorate covered Cannon Hill, to this day all the older residents of my electorate refer to the Bulimba electorate office as 'Tom Burns's old office'. He certainly left a permanent mark on the landscape there.

When Tom turned 50, his staff decorated the office with streamers and balloons. Tom roared with laughter. They gave him a glittery hat that had '50' on it and Tom wore it all day. They tell me he even wore it into this chamber.

When Tom became the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, he was given a new office in this House, which had been refurbished. He was overawed by that flash new office, but it did not take him long to turn it into Tom Burns's office and personalise it with his own style of messiness. There were boxes and paper files everywhere.

Winning government in 1989 was one of the major highlights in Tom's life. You could not wipe the smile of his face, and I am sure that he still has it now.

I recall one instance when Tom was Minister for Emergency Services and I had the privilege of driving with him from Cairns to Bamaga. I know other members of this parliament will well remember that trip. Every person in every township turned out to meet Tom, shake his hand and say g'day. There were barbecues and drinks at night. Tom would usually retire early, leaving others there. Before he left he would say, 'Fair dinkum, digger, you've got to look after them and make sure they have a drink', but before daylight Tommy Burns would be kicking on the door saying, 'Come on, the sun'll burn you out of bed. Let's get going. We've got to hit the track.'

One of my few regrets is that I never took Tom up on his offer to spend a day with him on his oyster lease, eating our fill of freshly shucked oysters and visiting his deadset guaranteed fishing holes. If there was one person who knew where to catch fish in Moreton Bay, it was Tommy Burns.

Tom was certainly a unique character. He was a larrikin, a defender of working men and women and a fisherman. However, above all he always remained a loving family man. I know that Angela, Gail, Linda, Samantha and the grandchildren will always miss him. We will never stop missing him. God bless Tom.