



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON ERNEST BRIDGE, MLA
(Member for Kimberley)

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 23 November 2000

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MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, VALEDICTORY SPEECHES

Motion

MR BRIDGE (Kimberley) [10.47 am]: I have been a member of Parliament for almost 21 years. During that time, things have not improved all that much. Last night it was planned that I would speak at about 11.30 am. Consequently, I planned for my family to be here for that time. I find that I am now speaking without their being present. However, I will not hold up the proceedings of the Parliament.

During my maiden speech 20 years ago, I went through all the thankyou's that I was excited to give as part of that speech. Now, 20 years later, I am going to revisit the things that interested me in a career as a member of Parliament. I will reflect in a positive way on the support that assisted me through the many years that I have been an advocate for the people of this State as a member of Parliament. Without a doubt, my family heads the list of people I want to acknowledge. They have given me absolute and continual support. My family and I have shared a career. It was clearly understood that it needed to be shared.

The electorate of Kimberley stood strongly behind me through those 20-odd years. That was borne out graphically in the last election when I stood for the first time as an independent candidate and was returned with a good majority. For that I thank the electorate of Kimberley. I also thank the Labor Party because without it I would not have had the privilege of serving as a member of Parliament. I would not have achieved some of those magnificent goals and outcomes that I now reflect upon with great pride and purpose. It is often the case that people come into a political environment through the agency of a major party and then, for reasons that emerge in subsequent years, find time to contemplate criticism of that party. I feel that is wrong. We must always remember that despite the circumstances that might have evolved in recent times, the grassroots of our position must always be factored into the position of the party. The party gave us the opportunity to enter into politics. I put on the record my appreciation of the Labor Party and my thanks to it.

Some major issues confronted me and the Labor Party that required management skills of the highest level to ensure that the outcomes were well managed. A major degree of maturity and responsibility was shown. Sensible management of these issues was factored into the outcomes. In this context, none was greater or more difficult to deal with than the day I made it known publicly that I would leave the Labor Party. That was a big decision on my part and no doubt it was a shock to the Labor Party. The management by Mr McGinty, the then leader of the party, and me of the events that preceded my announcement was outstanding. The fallouts and the viciousness that can follow such situations did not occur, and I will never reflect harshly on the Labor Party. The member for Fremantle managed the decision I made in a constructive way. He recognised that he could not change my way of thinking.

That was one of the great outcomes of which I have been a part. We were able to manage the situation so well that I look at the members of the Labor Party today and know we are all friends. I do not need to look back over my shoulders and wonder how they feel about me. I know how they feel about me - we are all mates, and that has not changed. Similarly, I have made good friends with the members of the Government over the years. There have not been too many times that we have felt unfavourably towards each other. A logical view has been taken about our disagreements; that is, the Government understood that my interests in this House have been a reflection of those of the community. The issues that I felt were important needed to be highlighted, reflected upon and stated in Parliament. Through that process I gained the Government's respect.

Being made a cabinet minister was by far the most important highlight and the most significant period of my time in Parliament, not only because historically I am the only person of indigenous descent who gained that position - that in itself is nice because it is a historical achievement - but also because it gave me that ministerial decree to drive many things - and drive many things I did. The Water Authority of Western Australia in those days did not like it, but I enjoyed it. During that time I was boss of that portfolio. As a result, many projects happened in the bush. The Minister for Primary Industry is nodding. Approximately 180 bronze plaques in the bush capture that period of success in this State's history. The big difference was that we were in control of what we wanted to happen. I hope that in future other ministers will understand the importance of that. At the top one has the ability to drive action and to make determinations; and one must take advantage of it. It is not always necessary to seek the indulgence of so-called advisers and professionals in one's attempts to execute a course of action.

I was involved in the exciting further dimensions of the development of the Ord scheme. As a consequence of that extension and further progress, progressing to the other stages of the Ord scheme will be achieved. The one regret I have is that I did not stitch up the Kimberley pipeline plan. Sadness surrounds the fact that, in my judgment, I was 12 months away from pulling it off when the people of this State, in their wisdom, decided to throw us out of government. They might have had good reasons to do so, but it was a tragedy for the State that I was not given the opportunity to at least start that project. That project would have meant more to this State in the future than all the other projects combined. It would have opened up the interior of the State. Who knows; some projects may well have been developed and supported by this Government and the public because they were seen to be right and working. That did not happen and one can only reflect on how it might have been different had that extra period of time as a Minister for Water Resources been made available.

I have always stood for ordinary Australians; in other words, the battlers. Whenever I have had half a chance in Parliament, I have made reference to the binding obligations placed upon us as politicians to remain strong. As I leave and other members enter the Parliament, I hope that members will remember these words: Never let go of the obligations we have to look after the interests of ordinary Australians because they make up Australia; they are Australians. Not only are they Australians, but also we are all Australians together.

My final plea to the members of this Parliament is never to lose sight of that reality and their obligation to fight for that cause. We should be doubly careful that we do not sell those virtues lightly, as we are inclined to do now, particularly in the way we are trading off the wonderful assets of this country. We are doing some very damaging things in pursuit of the dollar. Considering those beautiful assets of this country that are no longer owned by us, it is questionable whether that is the right course of action. I do not question it, I say it is wrong. The Government should be very careful about going too far with corporatisation. It is hard to find any way in which corporatisation supports the values of the ordinary Australian. My hope, as I conclude my time in Parliament, is that those of you who remain, and those who enter Parliament at the next election, will remember to keep Australia as it is, and keep Australia for Australians. I will conclude with a song -

I'm a dinky-di Australian, and I sing an Aussie song
I sing about this country, the land where I belong
I don't sing that Yankee stuff, with its southern drawl
I sing good old Australian, and let that music roll

Just take the song about this pub and the spider on the seat
The helicopter ringer and many similar beats
We don't sing that Yankee stuff, with its southern drawl
We sing good old Australian, and let that music roll

I'm a dinky-di Australian, and I sing an Aussie song
I sing about this country, the land where I belong
I don't sing that Yankee stuff, with its southern drawl
We sing good old Australian, and let that music roll

I went up to Tamworth, and at the judges' panel sat
And the few that sang Australian style, to you I lift my hat
At least you tried to be yourself, of that you must be proud
The rest were half-baked rockers, and their music far too loud

I'm a dinky-di Australian, and I sing an Aussie song
I sing about this country, the land where I belong
I don't sing that Yankee stuff, with its southern drawl
I sing good old Australian, and let that music roll
Yeh, I sing good old Australian, and let that music roll