

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, 22 December 1987

THE SPEAKER (Mr Barnett) took the Chair at 2.15 pm, and read prayers.

DEPUTY PREMIER

Retirement: Statement

MR BRYCE (Ascot -- Deputy Premier) [2.18 pm] -- by leave: I wish to confirm and to formally announce my intention to resign from the Ministry as Deputy Premier and from the Parliament as member for Ascot on 25 February 1988.

My reasons are basically family and personal, combined with a belief that the time is appropriate for a new generation of members to assume responsibility for the leadership of the Parliamentary Labor Party. By the end of this Parliament I will have been heavily involved in Western Australian politics for almost 25 years -- approximately 17 years as a member of Parliament, 15 years on my party's front bench, 10 years as Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party, and more than 10 years as a senior officer of the ALP. During these years I have had a very rich and rewarding experience which has given me the unique opportunity to work on the modernisation of the Labor Party; the rebuilding of the State Parliamentary Labor Party after our very major setbacks in the elections of 1974, 1975, and 1977; an opportunity to lay some useful foundations for the future technological growth of Western Australia; the preparation and the coordination of the policies of my party for the 1983 and 1986 elections; the restructuring of industry policy in Western Australia since 1983; and, fundamentally, the opportunity to work with so many other people to achieve some major reforms in our State's electoral laws.

Three of these areas of political involvement are of very real significance to me. The first was the formation of a new Labor Government in 1983. After our decimation at the polls in 1975 and again in 1977, which had followed the defeat of the Tonkin Government in 1974, a small handful of senior officers of my party in Western Australia accepted that a comprehensive rebuilding job had to be done. Early in the piece we recognised that, to be successful, we needed the right people in key seats and a whole range of other key positions in the political process, we needed a wholesale review and revision of policy, and we needed key people capable of presenting our party's case with expertise to the electors of Western Australia. It all came together for us in 1983 under the leadership of Brian Burke -- I might add, with a good deal of hard work, a certain degree of trauma within, and, as is always the case in politics, more than a modicum of good luck.

The second area of great significance for me was the opportunities that were afforded to me, as the State's first Minister for Technology, to lay a number of important foundation stones for the future technological growth of Western Australia. I emphasise to the House, and I think it comes as news to nobody, that that was without a doubt the toughest assignment I have ever undertaken in my life. For generations Western Australians have believed that our eternal economic salvation depends almost exclusively on more and more exciting primary industry projects related to mining, agricultural, and pastoral activity.

In respect of the world's "sophisticated economies", Australia appears to be one of the few countries, along with South Africa, where the words "intellectual" and "academic" have for so long tended to be terms of derision. My advocacy in the late 1970s and the early 1980s of new high technology sectors of the economy, brain intensive industries, new venture capital sources of funding, quality control programmes and new intellectual property policies, and increasing interaction between universities and industry, caused many of my friends in the Parliament, my own party, the Caucus, the Cabinet, and I must add I am sure at some stages some members of my own family, to believe that I had taken leave of my senses. The surest and perhaps the kindest indication that the perception of the importance of technology has changed is that no fewer than six of my Ministerial colleagues have indicated to me in recent days that they would be quite interested in my portfolio if there were to be a significant reshuffle as a result of my resignation from the Parliament.

Western Australia's first Technology Park at Bentley has been a great success and, now that we are over the hump of demystification, I urge my colleagues in Government to commit a major level of funding to two new technology parks or precincts for Western Australia. One in the vicinity of Cockburn Sound as a "defence technology precinct" specifically to provide a focus for the range of advanced technology facilities and equipment necessary to support defence industry growth. The defence forces relocation programmes with 50 per cent of the Royal Australia Navy Fleet being based in Western Australia over the next 10 years is of enormous importance to our State. By the year 2010 an additional 3 000 jobs will have been generated, and the State's gross economic output increased by more than \$3 billion. The other technology park should be in the Kwinana industrial zone as an "advanced materials engineering park" which would incorporate production of special alternative materials for export, value-added processing of mineral feed stock, and the manufacture of products based on new materials' technologies.

The third issue of real significance to me was the role I was able to play as Minister for Parliamentary and Electoral Reform in achieving, as I have said, with the support and cooperation of numerous other members of the Parliament, the modernisation of Western Australia's electoral laws. Few of us are lucky enough in this job to be able to work directly as the Minister responsible on the resolution of a major problem that one highlights in one's own maiden speech, perhaps as a cause celebre. That was my good fortune only after my friend of 20 years' standing, the former member for Morley-Swan, Arthur Tonkin, had led the campaign tirelessly for one and a half decades to focus public opinion on what is all too often discounted as something quite esoteric and of exclusive interest to members of Parliament. Despite our differences in this Chamber in respect of that matter, I do confidently believe that the principle of one-vote-one-value will be implemented during the last decade of this century.

Throughout the life of the past six Parliaments a number of important developments in the political process have occurred.

Members of Parliament are being elected at a much earlier age and there has been a noticeable shift in responsibility to young people. When I entered this Parliament in 1971 the leaders of the three political parties were in the seventh and eighth decades of their lives. Today, the leaders of all three political parties in the Legislative Assembly are in their forties.

The complexity of decision-making has increased quite extraordinarily; not only are decision makers today bombarded with a much greater volume of data, but their decisions are more effectively subject to appeal and more effectively placed under public scrutiny.

The power and the influence of the political party has increased at the expense of the individual, and it will come as no surprise to most of my friends and colleagues in this House that that is not a tendency that I deplore. Strong, viable branches of the Australia Labor Party, the Liberal Party, the National Party and the Democratic Party in Western Australia are, in fact, a vital and important guarantee to the future of democracy as an institution. Notwithstanding the romance that is sometimes attached to the notion of the MP who bucks the party system, the only period in this century when stable Government teetered on the brink of collapse was during the first decade when Governments were made and unmade almost exclusively on the basis of competing egos.

Mechanisms and processes by which political leaders today assess the mood of the electorate have increased greatly in sophistication. The seat of the pants intuitive judgments are now supplemented heavily by scientific research and polling. It is only 10 years ago that the Premier and I -- then very much still wet behind the ears -- caused the wrath of the gods to be brought upon our heads in the Labor Caucus when we dared to suggest that some of the scarce financial resources of the party should be spent on basic scientific political research of the electorate.

The events of 1975, which saw the sacking of the Whitlam Government by those who broke convention and who advocated the right of the second Chamber to reject Supply, injected a note of unforgettable seriousness into politics throughout Australia. In this institution, it went a long way towards developing a form of bitterness that had been hitherto unknown.

On a more light-hearted note, a general warning to my parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House from the retiring Minister for Technology: Representative democracy as we know it only evolved because people were unable to physically assemble in a practical

fashion for the purpose of decision-making. When I was first elected in 1971, approximately 50 to 60 per cent of my constituents' homes had telephones. Today that figure is close to 95 per cent, and by the turn of the century it is quite conceivable that all households will possess their own small but powerful personal family computer. I do not joke when I say that electronic networking could quite conceivably lead to the possibility of the instant general public response. Perhaps one day there will be no need for members of Parliament to argue endlessly into the night about their assessments of what their electors believe or think.

If a retiring member can be permitted in conclusion -- and I emphasise in shorthand -- to glimpse into the future, I want to refer to a number of emerging issues which I know my colleagues on both sides of the House will have to contend with in the immediate to medium-term future.

The increasing level of violence throughout Australia and the impact of 30 years of television has serious implications for the basic fabric of our society.

I have no doubt this Parliament, in the last decade of this century, will need to seriously address the issue of constitutional reform. Our Constitution was adopted in the last decade of the 19th century and was based upon the 17th century British model. I humbly believe in the limitations of that model, and I have serious doubts that the Westminster system can cope unamended with the demands of the next century.

The increasing problems of salinity, particularly in agricultural areas, but increasingly also in the metropolitan area, and the overall limits to the supplies of fresh water for both domestic and industrial purposes in Perth pose a major threat to the expansion of the State's economy.

The new and emerging sectors of the economy, which undoubtedly will provide the engines for growth well into the next century, include information technology, advanced materials, biotechnology, micro-electronics, aquiculture and medical technology. These new and emerging technologies demand that a much more serious interest in science be adopted by this Parliament. A scientist has never been elected to the Western Australian Parliament, and our first Standing Committee on science and technology has yet to be appointed. If scientists exercised anywhere near as much political clout in Australia as farmers or trade unionists, our country would be in the vanguard rather than simply just emerging from the ruck of the current technological revolution.

Australians in all States have to address the need for an export ethos at all levels of our community. None of us is a stranger to the business of export in a very general sense, but we have left the business of export to a small handful of experts, dealing with mega-contracts. Small countries and companies can and have developed valuable international markets which are market-driven and not product-driven.

I say finally in respect of the question of industrial and commercial restructuring that my friends and colleagues have heard me on countless occasions -- and I guess some of them may be tempted, with the sight of me, rear end in view, to say *ad nauseam* -- refer to the 1980s as the decade of transition. My last word in this place on that subject is that a society which understands the process of industrial and economic change and which can actually relish the process of change is a society which can go on to manage and direct that process.

A career such as mine, which has bridged two decades, inevitably involves a debt of gratitude to a large number of people. At the top of that list is my wife, Elizabeth, who had to contend with the dislocation of our first election campaign only six months after we were married in 1965. I could never have been as effective or lasted as long without her love, her support, her legendary patience and her quite remarkable ability to bring this particular politician back to earth. My four teenage children have adjusted tremendously to the challenges of a family which tends to live the life of a fish in a goldfish bowl. I will embarrass them publicly by making the point that one by one, at a very early age, they learned the trick of gaining the attention of a preoccupied Labor MP for a father by frequently threatening to vote Liberal when they grew up if they did not get their own way.

Mr MacKinnon: They sound like intelligent children.

Mr BRYCE: I begin to wonder whether their eyes were open when they were saying it.

I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to Brian Burke for his friendship and support. After five or six years of tugging at the bit from different directions, it has been a privilege to work in harness with Burke for the past seven years. I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to the electors of Ascot, who returned me to the Parliament on six successive occasions; to the

party whose endorsement I have very proudly carried; and to my Caucus colleagues, who inevitably become a form of extended family, whether we like it or not, over so many years. I have no doubt I will miss my regular contact with them. I wish to thank the members of the ALP throughout Australia, with whom I have shared moments of great jubilation and great trauma. I also wish to thank the members of my ministerial staff, who have worked prodigious hours, and my four electorate office secretaries: Maxine Henderson, Betty Willmott, Merrilyn O'Sullivan and Judy Mathieson, who have courageously and reliably handled in my absence many tough constituency problems. I would like to thank finally the members of staff in the institution of Parliament.

In conclusion, when one is worn out in this job, like a maturing athlete, one knows it. It is of fundamental importance to the State, the elector, and the political party that we represent that when that realisation strikes, we should not reach out for the cruise button and seek to continue on for years on the basis of our own political capital or on the basis of the inertia of the system, which tends to work in the interests of the sitting member. In a healthy democracy there are always thousands of keen and competent people to take our place.

[Applause.]

PREMIER

Retirement: Statement

MR BRIAN BURKE (Balga -- Premier) [2.38 pm] -- by leave: I have been a particularly fortunate man. I had no ambition to be Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party or of the Government when first elected to this Parliament as the member for Balcatta in July 1983, but it has been my privilege to have held both positions, and I have been particularly fortunate because no-one achieves either office without the help and the love of many others, and the support of the community.

My wife, Sue, and I decided soon after the election in 1983 that, God and elections willing, five years would be the maximum I would spend as Premier. There were a number of reasons for our decision. First, five years was as long as we felt able to deliver the concentration and commitment required. Second, we feared the effect on our family of any decision to stay longer than five years. Third, I have always been conscious of my own shortcomings, of the ability of those about me in the Government, and of the need to fulfil the ambitions of young, able and energetic members. Fourth, my view that the proper and efficient management of change is a major requirement for success in any political party. In the past six months Sue and I have reviewed our decision strenuously. We have been complimented by those who have said that I should stay but have decided the reasons for first making our decision have remained valid.

Accordingly, I stand down as Premier on 25 February 1988, the Government's fifth anniversary. I make this decision believing Western Australia is being governed as well as it has since statehood, the Ministry is able and talented, and the backbench reflects a quality not previously seen in the Parliamentary Labor Party. In social and economic terms the management of our State is in good hands.

Though I am standing down as Premier and as a member of this Parliament I hope that I will still be able to render service to our community. It is the Commonwealth Government's intention to offer me the post of Australian Ambassador to Ireland -- a post which I intend to accept and expect to take up in June.

Mr Speaker, the next decade, while full of promise, will be marked by challenging and difficult economic times. Those challenging times will not be met successfully if political or other prejudice dictates our reactions. If I could be presumptuous enough to think that I might be remembered for anything, I hope it will be as a Premier who encouraged soft, rational debate, who served during a period in which there was a lessening of unkind ideological confrontation and a reduction in the blind, cruel prejudice that too often blights our society. If I have done anything to promote an atmosphere of accommodating genuine debate then that is something I am happy to be remembered for; that was the abiding desire of the man who has been the greatest single influence on my life, both personal and political -- my father, Tom. My achievements are to his credit and I hope I have brought some of his forbearance, humility and unselfishness to this Parliament.

It remains only for me to thank the other great influence in my life -- my wife, Sue. Simply