

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Leader of the House) [10.08 pm]: I move -

That the House do now adjourn.

War in Iraq - Adjournment Debate

HON DEE MARGETTS (Agricultural) [10.09 pm]: Today many of my colleagues and I who came to this Chamber felt sick at heart. The reason we did was the announcements yesterday evening and this morning of the Australian Government's commitments of troops to an unjust and illegal war in Iraq. We have experienced an extraordinary situation over the past year or so, especially in the past few months. Many people in the community are becoming extremely well informed through a range of means, including the Internet and from reading from a range of sources. What has happened during that time is that because the media has become relatively well informed, we now have the unusual situation in which the majority of the citizens of Western Australia are opposed to Australian troops being committed to a war under these conditions. Clearly the majority of citizens of the majority of countries in the world feel the same way. Demonstrably the majority of the members of the United Nations General Assembly feel outraged at the proposal that there is no other option than to go to war, considering that at this stage the weapons inspectors are simply asking for more time. We have no indication that the majority of the members of the United Nations Security Council is in favour of the military option at this stage.

Why are the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, George W. Bush and Tony Blair taking the action that they are taking? Many theories have been put forward. Most of them have little connection with anything that is happening in Iraq and any immediate threats to Australia or the United States. Every time a good journalist manages to successfully corner our Prime Minister on any of these issues, the goalposts appear to shift. This evening I watched part of what appeared to be a very interesting and good interview by Kerry O'Brien in which he questioned the Prime Minister on the legal advice that has been provided on the legitimacy of taking military action. When Kerry O'Brien successfully pointed out that when United Nations resolution 1441 was debated it was specifically signified that it was not an automatic approval for military force, the Prime Minister once again shifted the goalposts and said that he was relying not on that resolution but on previous United Nations resolutions. No Government can commit a nation to war legitimately when there is so much division in the community and when the majority of its citizens are opposed to such action. No Government can fly against the majority of international opinion, including that of the Secretary General of the United Nations, about the legality of such action. Any Government that does so is putting its country at risk and is taking the regrettable step of putting the members of its armed forces in the terrible situation of not having United Nations legitimacy for their actions. No Government should put its armed forces in that situation.

I had thought that some commonsense would have been demonstrated. Until this morning I had the slimmest of slim hopes that considering the enormous level of concern that has been expressed across the political spectrum, including in my electorate, by such a large number of people, someone in the federal Cabinet would have spoken up. I cannot believe that every single member of the Cabinet truly believes that the actions that the Prime Minister has promised the American President will be taken are correct. Even given the relatively small number of people in Cabinet, it beggars belief that not one member of the federal Liberal Party had the moral courage to express any concern.

I participated in the peace walk in Esperance. The National Party member for Roe also marched, to his credit, behind the peace banner. He made the point of letting people know that he was marching as an individual and not as a representative of his party. He marched alongside more than 600 people from Esperance. As I have mentioned in this place, considering the size of that community, that probably represented the majority of the people in Esperance. Given that, where in the whole of the federal Liberal and National Party coalition are those people who share a similar view? When the world demands explanations at a later date, as I believe it will, when questions are asked under the international human rights laws in the future, and when those questions have to be answered by Australia - and after the Liberal Party has been wiped out at a future election by community opinion as a result of this action - not a single one of those parliamentarians who has shown no moral fortitude should come out and say to the community, "I did not really agree, but I had to do it." During the time I was in the federal Parliament, at least some members of the Liberal-National coalition would on a regular basis look at issues on their merits. The late Peter Nugent was one of those members. He had a lot of respect from a lot of people. He was also the chair of the human rights subcommittee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. There were others who took his lead, but it generally required someone with that kind of courage. It appears that no members of the federal coalition - male or female, frontbench or backbench - are prepared to open their mouths -

Hon Jim Scott interjected.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: No, apart from, as I have said, Ross Ainsworth, who had the courage to participate in the peace march in Esperance, and well done to him for that. I do not know how he voted on the motion moved in the Legislative Assembly today; I am not sure whether he was in the House. However, at least he marched, so full marks to him for making that decision. As far as I am concerned, those people who do not speak out are culpable now and in the future, regardless of whether they are state or federal parliamentarians.

Lobbyists and Consultants - Adjournment Debate

HON JOHN FISCHER (Mining and Pastoral) [10.17 pm]: I want to make some comments on recent articles in *The West Australian* about lobbyists and consultants in the Parliament. I never cease to be amazed by the ability of *The West Australian* to beat up an issue out of nothing and to ignore, hose down, distort or belittle matters of a much more serious nature. The article by Steve Pennells on page 20 of *The West Australian* of Friday, 14 March is typical of the attitude that is displayed in *The West Australian*. Frankly, I do not recall any concern about Barry MacKinnon's very successful practice as a consultant, nor that of Graham Kierath's. Apparently the evils of lobbyists depend on their political persuasion, unless, as is sometimes the case, those consultancies are a sinecure for services that have been rendered in the past. Most companies seek the services of a consultant only when all else appears to have failed. Consultants are like anything else: they are either good, bad or indifferent.

Often consultants get jobs from past allegiances or from the perception of employers that is not matched by performance. Of those selectively mentioned in the article in *The West Australian*, John Halden has completely missed the most important fact that goes right to the integrity of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, which is the main opponent of his employer's proposal for a development at Mauds Landing. Quite frankly, in looking at the matter further, it is hard to see Megan Anwyll, the former state member for Kalgoorlie, being very effective. *The West Australian* would have done the community a far better service if it had raised the question of jobs for the boys - or in this case jobs for the girls - when this Government burdened the Esperance Port Authority with her appointment to the board. One of the jobs of consultants is to point out to ministers simple commonsense that often eludes their staff or minders. They can often prevent ministers making blunders and save them losing face and losing sight of the issue in question.

It is typical of *The West Australian* to try to beat up this matter into an issue and it simply demonstrates the sheer size of its hypocrisy. Quite frankly, it is doubtful if any lobbyist has the power of Western Australia's only daily newspaper to affect outcomes. This newspaper campaigns on a capricious and often ill-informed basis. We, of course, never know whose barrow it is pushing or why it is doing so. Perhaps Liz Constable can devise some protection from this far greater evil and from the control of bureaucrats rather than coming up with ways to promote this ever-expanding nanny State. It is beyond me as to why people or companies should have to tell anyone what is essentially their own business. In any case, there is no way that this mandate could ever be enforced on foreign corporations or even on interstate companies. Further, the perennial problem for the Liberal Party is that it tries to have it both ways; it must get its act together. It is a trite but true expression that any Government in our system is only as good as the Opposition.

I suspect that the ire of *The West Australian* was raised in this case because of the involvement of Brian Burke. However, if one looks at the ability and achievement of ministers in Governments from both sides of the House in the past 20 years, Julian Grill has a most enviable record. He is a formidable negotiator and a man whose integrity I have no reason to doubt. However, I say without equivocation that Geoff Gallop should employ him as a consultant because he would probably provide far sager counsel than Jim McGinty, or anyone else with whom the Premier surrounds himself. The buck stops with the Government, as it should, on accountability. Consultants cannot make or implement decisions; that is the prerogative of government and ministers. What protection is there for the public and the best interests of the State when bureaucrats make decisions such as the recent long-delayed and completely illogical decision to stop the expansion of Portman Ltd into the Windarling and Mt Jackson Ranges? As I said previously in the House, I have tramped all over those hills and I am angry at the sophistry and pure humbug put forward by the Greens (WA) and their fellow bureaucrats in the Environmental Protection Authority. I ask the House to consider the protection that the public has against these zealots and what *The West Australian* will do about it. The answer to both these questions is nothing or very little. One need consider only the irresponsible and city-populist behaviour of *The West Australian* during the debacle in our forests. We had the best-managed commercial forest in the world, yet during that debate *The West Australian* simply abandoned science for the new green religion.

I am on record as saying that the present Royal Commission Into Whether There Has Been Any Corrupt or Criminal Conduct by Western Australian Police Officers is a farce that will nail only a few small-time, low-ranking coppers. I am also on record as saying that corruption cannot survive unless it is supported by the legal system and by senior police, or has the patronage of influential politicians, especially when it is never subjected to any real scrutiny by Western Australia's only daily newspaper. If we were to adopt the authoritarian suggestions of Liz Constable, which ideas are endorsed by *The West Australian*, we would also insist that all the business dealings of the board members of this pompous, pretentious, puerile monopoly-protected rag be open to

scrutiny. The time has certainly come for us to examine the influence on government of *The West Australian* and the reasons that has given for some of its past absolutely ridiculous reporting.

I have only nine seconds left and I want to say that the previous speech I listened to by Hon Dee Margetts, in my opinion, is treasonous.

War in Iraq - Adjournment Debate

HON LOUISE PRATT (East Metropolitan) [10.25 pm]: This is a sad day for Australia. I believe this war is wrong and that Australia should have no part in it. I believe the Prime Minister has committed Australia to this war simply because the United States President asked him to do so. I do not believe it is in Australia's national interests and I believe that there must be another solution. The Prime Minister committed Australia to the "coalition of the willing" quite recklessly. He should have considered Australia's national interests and indeed the interests of the -

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): Order! I call Hon Simon O'Brien to order for the first time and I hope I do not have to call him a second time.

Hon LOUISE PRATT: I was saying that I believe the Prime Minister should consider Australia's national interests and the interests of the Iraqi people, as I highlighted in a speech in this place a number of days ago on the humanitarian consequences of such a war. The Prime Minister has asked the United States about this war but he has not asked the Australian people. I believe the Australian people would come back with a resounding, "No, this war is wrong and we do not want to be part of it." Labor will continue to argue, as will the Australian people, that this war is wrong and this path can be reversed. I have grave concerns for the troops who have been committed to this war. I give them my full support but I completely disagree that they should be there. The Prime Minister has deployed troops to the region and I believe in doing so he has quite badly hoodwinked the Australian people. The rhetoric he gave at the time was that troops were not formally committed. However, it is clear, after today's events, that it took only a nod and a wink to see those troops fully engaged in the process. This is a war in which we should not be involved and I believe and hope that peaceful disarmament of Iraq is still possible. I am concerned that our involvement in this war will, as a consequence, spawn terrorism, encourage terrorists and make Australia more of a target for terrorism.

It is of grave concern tonight that the so-called "coalition of the willing" has only three partners, and that although Spain was part of the decision to withdraw from the resolution of the United Nations and, in effect, commit Australia to war, it has committed no troops of its own. Indeed, Australia was not even present at the meeting at which that occurred. It is sad that a golden opportunity with perhaps a unanimous decision under resolution 1441 of the United Nations to disarm Iraq was misconstrued to take us to war. I am very saddened at the abuse of the United Nations in this process. It is a sad day and I still hope for a peaceful outcome.

HON JIM SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [10.29 pm]: We have heard many debates on the issue about which Hon Louise Pratt spoke. There have supposedly been reasons for people to go to war. They have rambled over a number of areas during this long debate. First of all, it was because the United States had to deal with terrorism - the war on terror, as it is called. It was then discovered that Iraq had no links with terrorism. The debate then moved on to weapons of destruction. When the United States found that it could not show that Iraq had any weapons of mass destruction, the debate got down to whether some missiles went 20 kilometres further than they were supposed to go, even though they could not really be used against distant nations. It then got to the stage that the United States wanted to liberate people from the evils of Saddam Hussein.

Tonight I will quote from a letter from Sami Ramadani, who wrote the following article on the Guardian Unlimited web site -

A couple of weeks ago I went with my partner and our little boy to see our Labour MP, Bridget Prentice, in the House of Commons. We waited for two-and-a-half hours but she neither showed up nor sent a note. I wrote her a brief letter but she hasn't acknowledged it yet.

We are British citizens of Iraqi origin. My wife, who is Kurdish from Sulaimaniyah, fled Iraqi Kurdistan in the mid-1980s, risking her life in the process. I am also an exile and cannot go back to Iraq because of my resistance to Saddam's tyranny. Our son is four, and was born here.

I will skip a bit. It continues -

My wife sees Iraqi victims of torture every day where she works, at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture; we wanted to tell Bridget Prentice that Iraq is in desperate need of regime change and the establishment of a democratic order. The Iraqi people need it much more than Bush and Blair could ever understand. But democracy for Iraq will not be achieved by bombing and invading the country. It cannot be trusted to George Bush. The US will not accept a democratic verdict which is not

to its liking in a strategically important country, possessing the world's second largest oil reserves. They strangled just such a verdict in Congo in the 1960s and in Chile in the 1970s, and they are working hard to reverse it in Venezuela today.

In Iraq, the US record speaks for itself: it backed Saddam's party, the Ba'ath, to capture power in 1963, murdering thousands of socialists, communists and democrats of all shades; it backed the Ba'ath party in 1968 when Saddam was installed as vice-president; it helped him and the Shah of Iran in 1975 to crush the Kurdish nationalist movement; it increased its support for Saddam in 1979, the year he elevated himself to president, helping him launch his war of aggression against Iran in 1980; it backed him throughout the horrific eight years of war (1980 to 1988), in which a million Iranians and Iraqis were slaughtered, in the full knowledge that he was using chemical weapons and gassing Kurds and Marsh Arabs; it encouraged him in 1990 to invade Kuwait when the Arabic-speaking US ambassador in Baghdad, April Glaspie, told him on July 25 1990 that the US had "no opinion on Arab-Arab conflicts" when she knew that Saddam's forces were only one week away from invading; it backed him in 1991 when Bush suddenly stopped the war, exactly 24 hours after the start of the great March uprising that engulfed the south and Iraqi Kurdistan (US aircraft were flying over the scenes of mass killing as Iraqi helicopter gunships were aiding Saddam's forces crush the uprising); and it backed him as the "lesser evil" from March 1991 to September 11 2001 under the umbrella of murderous sanctions and the policy of "containment".

Then, having caused the death of about half a million Iraqis, mostly children, through sanctions, Bush and Blair declare that containment and sanctions are not working after all. Blair must reconcile his strongly and suddenly found conviction that war is better than containment with the fact that the US hawks, now prominent in the Bush administration, have been advocating a war on Iraq for the past 12 years - not to liberate the Iraqi people, or to protect the world from weapons of mass destruction, but to impose US hegemony on a strategically important country. September 11 gave them their opportunity. Blair's "sincerity", and his sympathy for the Iraqi people are, alas, nothing but grist to Rumsfeld's mills of war.

It goes on to say -

If allowed to run its course, the Blix programme of inspections would have emboldened the Iraqi people to challenge Saddam's regime in the knowledge that Saddam would not be using chemical weapons to crush future uprisings. This would have been particularly likely if the inspections and monitoring regime had been combined with strict military and diplomatic sanctions, while lifting the economic sanctions, which have not only caused so much death and pain for the people but also strengthened Saddam's hand against them. If all this had been coupled with an international campaign to aid the Iraqi people to remove Saddam and establish democracy, we are confident that they would have succeeded; their past heroic struggles were always hampered by US, wider western and Soviet backing for Saddam's regime.

The acceleration of war plans coincided with Blix's announcement of active Iraqi cooperation and his demands for a few months to complete his work. The US administration was clearly panicked by the prospect of a peaceful disarmament of Saddam. They are fearful of the prospect of seeing the Iraqi people taking on the tyrant and his dictatorial state.

Much is made of Tony Blair's courage. We are told that he is being brave in his deafness to majority opinion in Britain and the world. The truth is that he is mesmerised by US power, convinced he will be on the side of the victors and bask in the glory of their might once they raise the US flag in Baghdad, that beloved city of my childhood. But Blair's glory, even if it comes to pass, will be short-lived.

- Sami Ramadani is an Iraqi political exile and a senior lecturer in sociology at London Metropolitan University.

That is a sentiment of people who have lived through torture and who do not believe there is any sincerity in the leaders of Britain and the United States. I believe that could flow on to the leader of the Australian nation as well, because it is quite clear that John Howard has shown little sympathy for Iraqi people who have tried to come to this country after fleeing Saddam Hussein's regime. He has locked them up, sent them back and done anything he could to prevent their finding some sort of safety in Australia. It is appalling for him now to have the hypocrisy to say that he has their interests at heart. To my mind, it is clear that John Howard is the same as Tony Blair: he is mesmerised by US power and wants to be seen as one of the victorious few who stride through the streets of Baghdad when the inevitable happens and the hugely superior forces of the United States cause death and destruction in Iraq. That country has very little with which to defend itself, having been under sanctions and disarmed for a long time. We know that it will not be a war; it will be a one-sided slaughter. It is

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not a good thing for this nation to get involved in. As my colleague said, it is an illegal act and, according to Kofi Annan, those involved in it will be acting illegally. I believe they should be seen as war criminals.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.39 pm
