



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Greg Smith, MLC
(Member for Mining and Pastoral)

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 10 June 1997

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Consideration of Tabled Papers

HON GREG SMITH (Mining and Pastoral) [5.32 pm]: Mr President, I once again congratulate you on your election to your position. I am sure that you will preside over this Chamber in a fair and honourable manner. I also express my utmost respect for Hon Clive Griffiths, the retiring President. I watched with awe his ability to maintain decorum and dignity under extreme duress in his last few weeks as the President of this House. I thank all our parliamentary members for making me feel most welcome in the House. To other members who have just started, I offer congratulations and look forward to developing some sort of working relationship with them. To the staff in Parliament House, I offer my commendations for their pleasant nature and willingness to be helpful at all times. My particular thanks are due to the Liberal Legislative Assembly candidates from the Mining and Pastoral Region - Rod Sweetman, Barry Haase, Dominic Palumbo, David Parker, Karen McGay and Don Green. The hard work of these candidates and their campaign teams had a direct influence on my electoral success. Without the support of my wife, Marina, who is sitting at the back of the Chamber, who has had to endure long periods without her husband, I could not have achieved what I have now.

I will comment on how pleased I am to be here. I consider it to be the highest honour a person can have bestowed upon him. I will make every effort to uphold the honour and integrity expected of members in this House. From what I have been reading in *The West Australian* over the last few months, I feel fairly important because it has been quite obvious that until I arrived here no democratic decisions could be made. I am here now, and so democracy is back!

On a more serious note, I look forward to the challenge of negotiating legislation with the minor party members. I appeal to them to, please, come and see me or some of my colleagues, because we might be able to figure things out in a five minute conversation rather than go into lengthy debate here in the Chamber.

All solid institutions are subject to change and the Legislative Council is no exception. Ten years ago the voting system was changed to include proportional representation, and the new political composition in the Chamber is the inevitable if not the designed composition. Members like me have to cover a far greater area now than under the former province system. What should not change is our responsibility to the people who elect us and the cooperative and tolerant conditions of this House.

The Mining and Pastoral Region that I now represent can only be described as enormous. It consists of all of Western Australia outside the wheatbelt, and there is even a bit of that in it. The diversity of the region is equally enormous. There is the mining of iron ore, gold, nickel, copper, salt, numerous base metals and diamonds, and the extraction of oil and gas. Horticulture produces sugar cane, melons, bananas and grapes. There is an emerging cotton industry and the production of numerous other food crops. The fishing industry also makes a considerable contribution with the harvesting of prawns, scallops and numerous fin fish. Of course, the pearling industry has been established for a long time in the north. A tourism industry provides a large amount of employment and makes a major economic contribution to the region. This industry will continue to expand if the infrastructure is put in place to assist in travelling, by road or air, the vast distances between attractions.

The pastoral industry, in which I have been directly involved, is the longest established industry in the region. It is going through an extremely difficult time. Wool prices have been seriously depressed for seven years and cattle prices are very low. One of the only bright prospects is the live cattle trade to Indonesia. As only cattle with a high level of bos indicis blood are taken, not all producers are able to reap the benefits of this market. However, the live cattle market is one that should be nurtured, expanded and secured as it will go a long way to making the pastoral cattle industry a long term, economically viable prospect.

On reading the maiden speeches of Hon Norman Moore and Hon Phil Lockyer, who has now retired, I found it ironic that most of the issues raised then are just as relevant now. On the positive side, nearly everybody now has access to television and telecommunications; the road network has improved marginally; and the distance education unit set up by our Leader of the House when he was the Minister for Education has moved the School of the Air into the twenty-first century. On the down side, the introduction of the fringe benefits tax has decimated the mining towns with the introduction of fly in, fly out and 12 hour shifts and we must try to find a way to turn this around.

Native title has almost ground the region to a halt and can only be considered as one of the most divisive and destructive pieces of legislation ever to be thrust upon us. It has divided black and white, and it is even dividing the Aboriginal community, as there are many overlapping and conflicting claims. It has totally destroyed investor confidence in the whole region. We now have the major mining companies spending more on exploration overseas than they do in Australia. The development of the Ord to its full potential has been hamstrung for the last five years. Some 150 000 acres of agricultural land is ready for irrigation at the Ord River. It has not had a sod of dirt turned on it. It cannot be opened up. Even the development of residential and commercial property has been halted as native title encroaches on our regional towns. I am afraid the cost of this fiasco to Western Australia and Australia will never be known and probably even less appreciated. To give an example, I was in Leonora last week. The Leonora Shire Council estimates it has lost \$300 000 in rates in the last 12 months due to mining tenements that could not be taken up as they had native title claims pending. These are not just problems for the people who are directly affected; they strike at wealth generation. As such they strike at every Australian home. Not least they are a threat to the people who supposedly benefit from them - and I refer to Aborigines, not the legal profession. Aboriginal people will not be enhanced by national impoverishment, as poor countries can never provide social justice.

I find ironically amusing the damage that is done by many of the metropolitan based do-gooders who get a bee in their bonnet about certain issues and formulate a policy with only half the information. How proud must all the people be who had the Aborigines dragged off the sheep stations and into town because they thought they were being exploited and then gave them a pocketful of money and nothing to do. The end result was inevitable. People from all races congregate together and have a few drinks in their leisure time and now we can see the consequences of people having too much leisure time.

What about the animal liberationists that destroyed the fur trade? We once had a small industry and an export income from fox and feral cat skins. However, that has been destroyed and they now breed and multiply unchecked. These two species have accounted for the extinction of more of our fauna than any other species. Every conservationist should be wearing a fox skin jacket to show just how much he or she cares for the environment! In *The Bulletin* the other week, Jeff Short from the CSIRO division of wildlife and ecology said that the clamouring of United States' animal liberation groups over Australia's culling of kangaroos diverted valuable scientific resources from projects directed at animals that were headed for extinction, as intensive surveys have been made of kangaroo populations to prove Americans wrong. He said that all this time and money were being spent on an abundant animal doing very well, while a

whole suite of medium to small size mammals nobody had ever heard of were headed for extinction. I appeal to the Greens, therefore, to please listen to the other side of every story and to not operate with tunnel vision because the more affluent a country is, the better it can serve the environment. Brazil is an example of that.

I return to the Mining and Pastoral Region. One thing I have noticed about the demographics of the region is that there are more men than women. It is not a small imbalance; it is a difference of nearly 8 per cent. There are also very few people over 45 years of age in the region. What conclusions can I draw from that? The way I look at it is that Queensland is the retirement State for people in the east and our north west coast has a very similar climate. Therefore, there is every reason to believe that if the infrastructure were in place and the cost of living comparative, places like Carnarvon, Exmouth, Onslow and Karratha would become vibrant retirement destinations for what will be a fairly affluent ageing population. The most important publicly funded infrastructure required for this to happen is the provision of good medical facilities. Golf courses, bowling greens and all the other things that people want will come by natural evolution.

As to the imbalance of males and females, it is obvious that measures have to be adopted to get families back into the mining region. The Government has to take responsibility for making sure that women can enjoy a similar quality of life in the bush as they do in the city. I am aware that this will cost money. However, we cannot keep siphoning off money to the metropolitan area. The imposition of a gold royalty is a classic example of that. It will take 10 years' worth of gold royalties to build the Northbridge tunnel. If all that money came back to the goldfields region, the residents of my area would have some of the things that city people take for granted. As long as I am in this House, I will be trying to achieve that, not by trying to justify it, but because we deserve it as this State's wealth is created in the mining and pastoral region.

That has covered some of the broader issues in my area. I now advise the House where I stand on some of the broader issues. I am unashamedly right wing. If I were not, I would be on the other side of this place. My father was a lecturer and had a PhD in sociology. Without realising it I became a student in the study of society. One thing I realised is that incentive is the most important criterion for motivation, whether it be physical or mental, and socialism tries to make all people equal. I come to this House as a Liberal with a firm belief in the right of individuals to make their own decisions and reap their own rewards. People who work harder or are smarter deserve those rewards whether they be financial or social. If that is not possible, they will do only what they have to do, not what they are capable of doing.

Our generous welfare system is an aberration of a prolonged socialist Federal Government and for many it is now a viable alternative to having a job. Social security was designed to provide a living to the unemployed, not to enable people to maintain their present standard of living when they lose a job. I firmly believe that the traditional family unit is the most desirable environment for children to grow up in, and I am in no way belittling single parents. I would never expect a person to stay in a relationship in which he or she is subject to physical or mental abuse. However, the Government should provide assistance and encouragement by whatever means to couples in crisis, and separation should be viewed as the last option, not the first. The more families that can be kept intact and healthy, the better it will be for all of us.

The Aboriginal industry - I emphasise the word "industry" as many individual Aborigines are trying very hard to improve the conditions and lifestyles of Aborigines who do not come under this umbrella - consumes massive amounts of money. Nearly all the Aborigines that I know are no better off than they were 10 years ago. I am prepared to accept anyone, regardless of race, religion or colour, as an Australian if their agenda is to help this great country of ours grow and prosper. However, the Aboriginal industry's agenda seems to be the exact opposite. It is preventing potentially lucrative mineral deposits from being mined; the Ord irrigation project is producing only 50 per cent of its potential; it is taking productive pastoral properties and making

them unproductive; and it is putting obstacles in front of nearly every other proposed project. There seems to be unlimited money for lawyers, consultants and bureaucrats involved in the industry while the grassroots Aborigines struggle to receive adequate education and health care. It is a mystery to many people where all the money goes. Until this industry becomes fully accountable, it will be viewed with suspicion and disdain by many Australians.

Over the past week we have heard a lot of talk about the stolen generation. However, we have heard very little about the fact that most of the successful Aboriginal people that are now fighting the cause for their ilk in a very articulate and educated manner are products of this historical injustice. It is worth placing on the record that some good came from this policy. When I asked a well-educated indigenous friend of mine how he felt about being taken from his family, he said he was glad because if it had not happened he would be an unemployed alcoholic living in Meekatharra. Therefore, it is true that every cloud has a silver lining.

As to the expectation of some that I should bear some guilt for the stolen generation, I ask all members whether all non-Jewish Germans are expected to carry the burden of the Holocaust for eternity. Any third generation Australian of non-Aboriginal descent must feel very confused at the moment. On the one hand they have been told to feel guilty and to take responsibility for the actions of their great-grandparents and, on the other, they are told to forgive and forget the fact that many of their family members in the past fought and died to protect Australia from Asian invasion and we must welcome them with open arms. The hypocrisy of that is unquestioned. My opinion and policy on this subject is that present Australians, including me, bear no guilt and hold no animosity for the actions of previous generations and we should all be able to get on with our lives together.

Another thing that we must have a long hard look at is the treatment of boat people. Whether they are economic refugees or illegal fishermen, the moment they enter our waters they have demonstrated a disrespect for our laws. Anybody who looks at a map of the world can easily see it is no accident that they have drifted into our waters and onto our coast. When they get here we feed, clothe, house and pay them better than they have experienced before. I have said that incentive is the motivator; however, the opposite is also true. I would not call our current method of operations a deterrent. As soon as they are caught we should sink their boats and put them on the first flight home. Any human rights activists who want to take up the violation of their rights can go back with them and take up their case in the country the boat people came from. We have many people in the region who migrated to Australia some years ago who are trying to get permission from authorities in order to reunite families; in particular, Australians from the former Yugoslavia who may have close family members who cannot secure migration despite the war that has devastated their lives. Even though they have followed all the correct channels and have offered to financially support the immigration of their family members they have been unsuccessful. I can imagine the disillusionment and resentment these people must feel when they see people who have turned up uninvited and have violated all the laws to get here being accepted as migrants. Even if they are unsuccessful there appears to be no shortage of legal assistance made available to them. If some Australians honestly believe these people should have access to lawyers - a luxury these days - let them, not the public purse, provide it.

It is very easy for urban people to demand that all state electorates in both Houses of Parliament accord with the principle of strict equality of enrolments or, to give it its popular name, one-vote-one-value. They forget there is no equality of access to representation from a member of Parliament in the next suburb to one hundreds of kilometres away. While the electoral system needs to be changed from time to time, I can assure this House that the people of the Mining and Pastoral Region do not want to lose half their members in the Legislative Assembly and, effectively, their MLCs, who could disappear into some vastly more populous region. A number of local councils in the region have made their opinion on this matter clear and we do not see one-vote-one-value bringing fair representation, but quite the reverse.

We heard from other members in their maiden speeches that there is a perception that the State's economic boom in the north is not filtering down to the metropolitan area. Well, let me tell them that this could not be further from the truth. For instance, the entire hot briquette iron plant is being fabricated in Perth and constructed in Port Hedland. The Great Northern Highway has on it a constant stream of trucks heading north and they are loaded with transportable homes, construction equipment and other goods too numerous to mention. All this is providing enormous employment in the metropolitan area. If that was not the case, all the people who are now working in Port Hedland would probably be in Perth, unemployed.

In conclusion, I would like to make it clear that I am not here to represent any minority group. I will leave that to members opposite. I am here to represent the silent majority; that is, all the people who are getting on and working to better themselves and make a decent life for their families. The one thing I would like to make quite clear is that I am not a Fabian, fascist, socialist, sexist, racist or bigot; I am a realist. Some members may have a problem with that. Reality is not always what we would like it to be, but it is only through facing up to reality that we can build a better lifestyle and a better State. Fortunately, if we cooperate together we have the power to change it for the better for all Western Australians.

[Applause.]
