



Legislative Council

Save Callan Park Bill Hansard - Extract

26/09/2002

Second Reading

Ms LEE RHIANNON [11.09 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Callan Park is an inner-city miracle-61 hectares of parkland, harbour foreshore, and heritage buildings. It is truly miraculous that such a park has survived to this day. It provides an oasis of green space in the crowded inner city, and it is so beautiful and has such heritage significance that it is used and loved by people from across the State. Callan Park may have survived until 2002, but if the Carr Labor Government has its way it will not survive much longer. It is only the proud defiance of the people of the area, supported by the Greens, the wider community, and many other organisations that is standing between Callan Park and Labor's developer mates. The Save Callan Park Bill is one contribution that the Greens are making to this vital campaign. The bill requires Callan Park to be retained in public ownership and it restricts uses of the existing buildings to community, education and health uses.

The Save Callan Park Bill allows existing buildings to be refurbished or replaced but only in such a way that does not increase the total footprint or the floor space ratio from the status quo. The bill is also explicit in not overriding the Heritage Act, so that the heritage structures will continue to be protected. It is a simple, straightforward bill that does exactly what it says and exactly what the community is demanding-it saves Callan Park! The campaign to save Callan Park, orchestrated in the main by the Friends of Callan Park, has been truly inspirational. I have rarely seen such a well-organised, consistent, well-supported and thoroughly impressive campaign.

One of the key achievements of the Save Callan Park campaign has been a petition containing 18,000 signatures. Honourable members see petitions handed up in this House and know that 18,000 is an astonishing number of signatures on a petition. That demonstrates the depth of public support for this issue. Equally striking is the range of suburbs from which the signatories come-obviously from the local area but also from across the city and the State, and even from overseas. Also, there have been several extremely well-attended rallies and public meetings. The rally held on 18 August this year was quite amazing, with about 1,000 people walking along the streets from Orange Grove Public School to Callan Park, where the crowd was addressed by a number of high-profile supporters and several politicians. Prior to that rally, on 7 August Balmain Town Hall had been the venue for a packed public meeting, with about 700 people in attendance.

It is exciting to see a community so united and so determined. At all of those events the message has come through loud and clear: no-one wants Callan Park to be sold off-that is, no-one other than the Labor Party hierarchy and the developers. The urgency of this issue, and, therefore, of this bill, is that Labor is moving quickly to get the developers in. Submissions to the proposed master plan closed on 5 September. Exhibited in concert with the master plan was amendment No. 7 to State environmental planning policy 56, which suspends Leichhardt council's development controls and introduces the Labor Government's development free-for-all.

Once one looks past all the public relations guff and artists impressions, the result is clear: there will be about 1,200 dwellings on the site. That is absolutely huge, and the impact will be enormous; it is a mammoth development by any standards. By comparison with those 1,200 units and townhouses, World Tower, the 75-storey Meriton monolith under construction at the other end of town on George Street, will have around 700 residential and commercial units-that is about double the number. Breakfast Point, the entire new suburb being built on the old AGL site near Cabarita, will have around 1,400 dwellings. The proposed development at Callan Park will be one of the largest residential development sites in Sydney in recent years, a massive sell-off of public land, and a massive gift to Labor's developer mates.

When one looks at the map that accompanies the master plan, it is very clear that the development has been designed with the developers in mind. The apartment blocks will hog the high ground in Callan Park, allowing extensive views over the harbour. Because of their location they will have the greatest detrimental impact on that beautiful site. This is prime Sydney real estate, which would have apartments and townhouses set in a beautiful and historic park with harbour views. If you multiply 1,200 by the cost of such Sydney property you begin to get some idea of what is behind the sell-off. It will be \$1 billion worth of real estate, quite literally. It is a developer bonanza, courtesy of a Labor Government. It is a vicious betrayal of Labor's inner-city heartland to hand over Callan Park to the developers.

Throughout this whole sorry saga, one constant has been Labor's arrogant contempt for public opinion. The local member, Ms Sandra Nori, has repeatedly derided and denigrated opponents of the sell-off. That has been one of the ugly aspects of this story. She is completely out of step with her electorate. The Minister for Planning, Dr Refshauge, has done what he too often does: favours for developers. Perhaps the most startling public expression against Labor's attitude came when the MacLeod family of Wharf Road, Birchgrove, sent an e-mail to many members

asking them to save Callan Park, as they use it and value it so highly. Ms Burnswoods responded as follows:

Dear MacLeods,

Is Callan Park really near Wharf Road, Birchgrove? And why won't you still be able to walk, cycle, etc. in the huge percentage of the site which will remain open space?

I am sure my colleagues will agree that that is classic Burnswoods. There you have it: when members of the public, quite possibly Labor voters, question the Callan Park sell-off, they are met with aggression, treated with sarcasm, and accused of being liars. That is today's Labor Party. What drives a party such as the Labor Party so far from its supporters in a heartland area? One often wonders just how things ever got so bad. Part of the answer is the extent to which corporate donations have corrupted the political process in this country. In the past three years of reporting to the Australian Electoral Commission, the New South Wales Division of the Australian Labor Party declared \$2,273,613 in donations from property interests: developers, real estate agents, and so on. That is just to the New South Wales Division of the Labor Party.

How can the public be expected to have any confidence whatsoever in the fairness of the planning processes when that process has been so tainted? Of course, the Coalition is also guilty of seeking and accepting such donations, and the public is increasingly cynical of the motivation of both major parties. Labor claims that the Callan Park sell-off is necessary to fund a new mental hospital at Concord. That is a pretty pathetic and tragic reason. The fact that Labor is pushing this line does not say very much for it. The Labor Government argues that essential public services, core government activities, can only be funded through the sell-off of public assets; that is the line it is pushing. The Labor Party has been so captured by economic rationalism that the best it can do is come up with this miserable argument.

The Greens have been arguing for some years that New South Wales desperately requires better mental health facilities. Labor has failed to deliver these facilities since 1995. Let us remember that Labor has had more than seven years to act on this commitment. But this is not a poor State. The New South Wales budget is in surplus, and money can always be found for expensive new prisons, lavish advertising campaigns, or whatever else suits the Government's re-election agenda. The New South Wales Government is perfectly capable of properly funding mental health; it lacks only the political will to do so. So, that lame excuse can be dismissed very quickly.

It is an extraordinary insult to all those who support saving Callan Park to say, as Labor continues to say, that if you support Callan Park you oppose better funding for mental health. It is a bullying tactic intended to intimidate people out of speaking up. It is demonstrably a lie, and it brings shame on Labor to use such a gutter tactic. One of the hallmarks of the Save Callan Park campaign has been the extraordinary support it has garnered from across the political spectrum. The only party in New South Wales politics that is on the record as supporting the sell-off is the Labor Party. It is a remarkable day for New South Wales when the Greens and the Coalition line up against Labor on a public land issue, which demonstrates just how out of touch the Labor leadership has become.

Many local Labor members and activists support saving Callan Park but they have been steamrollered and ignored, just like the rest of the community. It is no wonder that Labor has lost so much support in its inner-city heartland. The Greens will do everything in our power to support the community's campaign to save Callan Park. The South Coast community had a major victory this week when people power put an end to the plans for a charcoal factory at Mogo. The community can see crude environmental vandalism for what it is, whether it is on the South Coast or in Sydney's inner city.

If Labor cannot be convinced of the merits of saving Callan Park, it will have to wear the consequences. The Greens say to the community: Never give up in your fight to save Callan Park. You are right and the Government is wrong. Attend the public rallies, write letters, sign petitions, and hang those green ribbons on your fence. By supporting the Save Callan Park Bill, members in this House can send a strong signal that they, too, stand with the community. By working together we can save our inner-city miracle and restore some public faith in the political process.