



Legislative Council

Budget Estimates And Related Papers

15/11/95

Hansard

Extract

The Hon. C. J. S. LYNN [5.23]: I am deeply conscious on this occasion of the honour bestowed upon me as a member of the Liberal Party in the New South Wales Legislative Council. Before I speak on certain aspects of the budget papers I wish to make a number of preliminary comments and observations. I pay tribute to my immediate family for the unconditional love and support I have received from them throughout my life; to my parents, Melva and Keith Lynn, who made great sacrifices to ensure that a family of eight children never wanted for the basics in life; to my wife, Jill, for the love, loyalty and support she has given to me during our 29 years of marriage; to my daughters Sharon, Terri and Tracie, who have been such a source of love, joy and pride to me; and to Jill's late father, my father-in-law, Massey Herbert, and my mother-in-law, Alice Herbert, for their guidance and support. I pay tribute also to two special people who influenced the development of my values during my formative years. I refer to my parish priest, the late Father O'Regan, and my teacher, the late Sister Antoinene of St Joseph's School at Orbost.

I am also indebted to members of the Liberal Party for providing me with the opportunity to represent their ideals in this historic Parliament. In particular, I sincerely thank my campaign team which comprises David Funnell, Roger Worner, Len Joyce, Charlotte Sheehan, Debbie Dewbury, Wanda Sharpe and Merle Kelly, as well as all the loyal branch members in Camden, Picton, Bargo, Warragamba, Southern Highlands, Leppington-Catherine Fields and Badgerys Creek. I come to this Parliament as a representative of the ordinary battlers - Australian battlers in our society. I have spent the whole of my life in their company. I was raised in a small timber home on the banks of the Snowy River in East Gippsland. My great grandfather, who came out from Ireland as a young man, was one of the early pioneers in the area. At the age of 11 my grandmother was a cook for 20 shearers at Delegate. In 1901, at the age of 13, she hitched a ride on a bullock cart and arrived at Orbost. My grandparents, like all other pioneers to the Snowy Valley area, struggled against isolation and the ravages of mother nature to establish a hard-working and close-knit community.

As the eldest of eight children I clearly remember the struggle my parents had in trying to provide us with the basic necessities of life. I now consider myself fortunate to have been raised in this environment because it taught me to take nothing for granted. It instilled in me a sound work ethic, it made me appreciate the value of strong family bonds, and it created a desire to do better. I was working in a Country Roads Board camp when I was conscripted into the army in 1965. I served in Vietnam in 1967 and then decided to make a career out of the army. During my 20-year service I was stationed mainly in areas that were either remote or on the outer fringes of metropolitan areas. Those areas had a high proportion of military families battling to make ends meet, but a strong sense of community prevailed. Since leaving the army I have lived in the south-western suburbs of Sydney. My friends in the Macarthur area are all fair dinkum Australians battling to provide a better life for themselves and their children.

Such people are the backbone of this country. Their families are the most important thing in the world to them; they belong to local voluntary

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organisations which work towards building better communities; they risk all they have in their quest to build their businesses; and they do this despite the crippling burdens that big government and big unions place on struggling small business owners in Australia today. These battlers have been betrayed by big business, big government and the big unions of this country. A report card on the leadership in these institutions was contained in the recently released Karpin report entitled "Enterprising Nation". That report was commissioned by the Federal Government to examine our leadership and management effectiveness with a view to preparing ourselves for the opportunities which will be available with the emerging economies of the Pacific rim nations. In an objective study of 22 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries our middle management was ranked a lowly seventeenth and our senior management was ranked even worse at nineteenth. It is a sad fact that we now rank behind countries such as Turkey, Spain and Italy.

In my view something has gone terribly wrong with our political, corporate and union leadership over the past 50 years. Fifty years ago our leaders were second to none. What has gone wrong? It seems to me that we are able to handle adversity during the tough times, as our early history proves time and again, but we seem to have a problem coming to grips with prosperity. Our history shows that Australians have always had to react to adversity. It is not something that we consciously sought, but whenever adversity presented itself, whether in the form of a world war, flood, fire, drought or isolation, our forebears, ordinary Australians, were equal to the task. As we conquered each challenge we found that each experience or phase contributed to the development of a special Australian ethos. Our first test as a nation was the Great War of 1914 to 1918. Our landing on the beaches of Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 is regarded as the baptism of our nation. The young men there experienced all the fears and horrors of war in the trenches throughout Europe but they overcame the adversity surrounding their circumstances and went on to establish a proud Anzac legend.

The Great War cost us dearly. When it concluded we had to recommence the task of nation building, minus a generation of young men. A little more than a decade later we were plunged into the Great Depression. During this period of adversity the dreams, goals and aspirations of our forebears were reduced to the provision of the next meal for their families and the next day's work. It was an experience that left an indelible imprint on the minds of our grandparents. Within another decade we were plunged into another world war, and once again ordinary Australians answered the call and fought with great distinction in the Western Desert of Africa and throughout Europe. In 1942 we were faced with the threat of imminent invasion. Again our population rallied and we sent off hastily trained teenagers to the islands to our north to meet the threat. I am proud to say that both my father and my father-in-law were amongst the young men who answered the call.

After the war these young veterans returned to our work force. The characteristics of leadership, mateship, discipline and courage were transferred from the battlefields to the goldfields, the wheat fields and to far-flung places around Australia where they recommitted themselves to the task of nation building. We provided a home and the opportunity for a new life for the displaced people of Europe. Our leaders were visionaries; they embarked on ambitious national projects such as the Snowy Mountains and the Ord River schemes. They embarked on an ambitious immigration program, and we prospered. It was an era in which work was plentiful and the work force was willing. Our rural, mining and manufacturing industries prospered and our standard of living was second to none. However, we continued to live under the threat of the Cold War. During this time our troops were sent to Korea, Borneo, Malaya and then Vietnam, where they upheld the proudest traditions of the Anzacs.

Vietnam was a watershed in regard to our community attitude towards fighting what were perceived to be other people's wars in foreign countries. I do not intend to address the rights or wrongs of that conflict, except to say that our young men and women who served there were sent by politicians. Since that time Australians have not experienced the threat of war, or the fear of fair dinkum adversity as experienced by our parents and their forbears. This is something for which we should be universally grateful, but it is interesting to note how we have handled our years of prosperity as opposed to our years of adversity. In the early 1970s the Whitlam Labor Government attempted, with the best of intentions, to share our nation's wealth on a more equitable basis. Unfortunately, it overcompensated and we had inadvertently sown the seeds for a welfare-dependent society.

The 1980s spawned the what's-in-it-for-me generation. Materialism was the new religion, and during this period many young graduates were quickly earning more money than their parents had ever dreamed of earning. They developed a taste for fast cars, expensive restaurants, exclusive suburbs, and exotic holidays. Established values such as loyalty to corporations, communities, and even families were eroded. Adversity was not experienced or confronted. If it loomed, they simply jumped ship and went to another company. If their relationship struck a rocky patch, they simply opted out and left the State to pick up the tab. It was life in the fast lane, and the majority of the work force - the steady battlers - watched these young whiz-kid managers come and go. They did not trust them, nor did they respect them. We even had politicians surrender their values in exchange for a slice of the action. We now refer to this era as the decade of greed.

The bubble burst in the early 1990s with the recession we had to have. Entrepreneurs went belly up, the ethics of many of our corporate and political leaders were exposed and found wanting, and there was a devastating wipe-out of middle management. So history tells us that we seem to be able to

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overcome adversity whenever the challenge arises, but the Karpin report indicates that we have a problem with prosperity. Fortunately, I believe our young people are realising that materialism does not necessarily mean fulfilment. Many have come to realise that the accumulation of wealth is not necessarily a recipe for success, and the people who have come to this realisation are not waiting for adversity to be thrust at them, they are actively seeking it.

This is reflected in the growth of adventure sports. Young graduates are now seeking to challenge themselves by trekking off to the Himalayas, by sailing, by skydiving, by bungee jumping, by white-water rafting, by bushwalking and so on. Each successful experience leads to an increase in self-confidence, a better understanding of self, a better understanding of others, a better understanding of our environment, and the establishment of soul-mate relationships with their contemporaries. The recent bushfires in New South Wales and the drought that is gripping our rural areas have proved that ordinary Australians will continue to rally whenever they are confronted with adversity. My belief that adversity brings out the best in people was reinforced in a recent report which revealed that the children of migrant families are now outperforming Australian children. This was not a surprise, because I believe that the children of migrant families know first-hand of the sacrifices made by their parents to feed, clothe and educate them. As a consequence, they are motivated by a desire to achieve and repay the debt to their families.

The point of my potted historical analogy is to suggest that if we want to be a major competitive player in the emerging economies of the Pacific rim we have to get back to basics in the development of our young Australians. We have to recognise the potential that each individual has for greatness, and provide the environment for that potential to be harnessed. We have to adopt a system and an ethic which encourages and rewards initiative. As politicians, we must lead the way by lifting our game. Just the other night I listened as one of our honourable members presented a case for family-friendly hours in this House. Whilst I appreciate the motivation behind the idea, I believe it would be counterproductive because it would remove us a little further from the reality of the real world where ordinary Australians are battling to cope. We would probably gain more respect if we adopted small business hours or farming-friendly hours. This would mean we would sit for six days a week and devote the seventh day to catching up on paperwork. It would be tough, but no tougher than what the battlers in the real world are experiencing.

So rather than looking for ways to make life easier for ourselves, I believe we should be working harder and longer with a view to making life easier for our small business owners and our rural communities. We should think ourselves fortunate that we are able to operate in the comfortable cocooned environment of this House. I decided to seriously enter politics on the night of 13 March 1993. I clearly remember the night because it was the culmination of a desperate campaign by a desperate Prime Minister. I remember that ordinary Australians had been deliberately and deceitfully misled. I believe that the Prime Minister had gained power by lying to the Australian people. I decided that night that I could either whinge and moan about the situation - one wherein a political party had delivered the highest levels of unemployment and the highest levels of foreign debt in our history - or I could elect to do something about it. I then decided to take action, and joined the Liberal Party because it accords with my personal philosophy of the rights of individuals to choose their destiny.

As a political candidate in Labor heartland out in the south-west of Sydney I was able to observe the impact of Labor's neglect of its true believers. As I doorknocked the various housing commission areas and observed the high levels of unemployment and the prevalence of single-parent families it became painfully evident that we had created a welfare-dependent society. We now have the social situation in those areas of children whose parents and grandparents have never had a job. I have noted in the budget that the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, and Minister for Housing, the Hon. Craig Knowles, is funding initiatives to improve the quality of housing in those areas. I know the Minister is fair dinkum in his endeavours to improve the lot of the residents in these areas, and he has my full support for the initiatives he is funding through the budget.

Unfortunately, the Minister's initiatives are simply window-dressing the deeper problems that exist in

these areas. In creating a welfare-dependent class of people we are consigning them to a life without a destiny. We are in fact creating a social underclass, and the adverse social symptoms of crime, drug abuse, child abuse and so on will stem from this social creation. The people themselves do not like the situation, but they feel helpless to do anything about it. They feel they are being manipulated by being put on endless job-training schemes for jobs that do not exist. When they do get the chance to look for a job they find that they can earn almost as much money by staying at home and taking advantage of all the welfare benefits. They drink more beer, smoke more cigarettes, eat more junk food and become more frustrated, until one day they explode. Society eventually pays the cost. Unfortunately, bricks, mortar and a new coat of paint in these areas will not solve this social problem.

The solution lies in the adoption of policies which will restore the self-esteem of these people, but we will only do so by providing them with the incentive and the opportunity to get a job and provide for their own destiny. If able-bodied people choose not to work, they must accept the outcome of a lower standard of living. I should place on record that I have a strong commitment to our social responsibilities for disadvantaged people, and I would not like my remarks to be interpreted otherwise. Indeed, I believe that the current social situation of

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our long-term unemployed is so bad that we have a responsibility to ensure that they are guaranteed benefits at their current levels until, and if ever, they get a job. After all, they did not create the problem, a government did.

The challenge for government now is to formulate a vision to give hope and opportunity to our youth, and to have the courage to adopt policies which will give them the opportunity to fulfil their dreams, goals and aspirations. Unfortunately, the Labor Party will never be able to formulate realistic solutions whilst it remains hostage to a trade union movement whose policies and practices remain wedded to the industrial age. The information age demands an environment in which individual freedom, individual enterprise, and individual initiative must be encouraged. A great proportion of people out in the south-west who do have jobs have to commute into the city. The costs of servicing mortgages for the many first-home buyers in the area, and the costs of transport and child care for those with young families are crippling. So when the Premier, the Hon. Bob Carr, and the honourable member for Campbelltown, the Hon. Michael Knight, gave them an unequivocal promise to lift the tolls on the M5 motorway to secure their vote, many people gave it to them. I believe it was this promise, more than any other, which secured government for the New South Wales Labor Party. The promise was broken as soon as government was secured, and the battling workers of Labor's heartland were betrayed once again.

I also want to comment on the influence of city-based environmental yuppies in the management of our rural areas. I believe that political parties who sell their souls to minority groups intent on shutting down our rural industry and destroying our bush culture should urgently review their values. This morning I learned that a former workmate of my brother in Orbost had his equipment destroyed in the bush. Eco-terrorists from the Green movement torched his bulldozer and all of his other equipment. Equipment worth \$300,000 was destroyed. Eight families will now be out of work until well after Christmas, if they ever get back to work at all. This type of eco-terrorism is now prevalent in our south-east forests. The situation in my home town is so tense that ordinary, battling, law-abiding citizens are now talking about arming themselves to protect their very livelihood in the bush. The actions of these eco-terrorists who are intent on closing down our timber industry must be tempered before somebody is killed.

The timber workers in these areas have achieved world best forestry practices and are operating within the strict rules and regulations of the Government. I want to put on notice my commitment to ensure that workers in our timber industry are given adequate protection to carry out their lawful work and that Green eco-terrorists are brought to justice and held accountable for their actions. I also want to address the proposals of this Labor Government to deny vast areas of wilderness to all except the city-based environmental yuppie. These people are often well meaning in their quest to have a wilderness experience. They pop into a Paddy Pallin store, kit themselves out in the latest colour-coordinated gear, try on some designer trekking boots, and buy a little silver billy. Unfortunately, many of them have been conditioned by extreme Green propaganda and believe the bush should be left in its natural state just in case they ever decide to give up a night at the opera or the theatre to have a weekend out some time in the future.

But the bush belongs to us all. For our rural communities it provides the resources we need to establish and maintain the lifestyles we enjoy in this great country. For people from the city it provides natural wonders, breathtaking landscapes, fresh air, pure water, spectacular sunrises and sunsets, and an opportunity to understand and appreciate the awesome power and beauty of mother nature. Some find this by trekking through it, others by exploring it on horseback, and others by exploring it in their recreational vehicles. We have State organisations in place to ensure that our bush and wilderness areas are protected against the invasive damage of weeds and feral animals, against erosion and pollution, against the ravages of flood and fire, and against the unnecessary exploitation of nature's resources. It should be the charter of these organisations to conduct ongoing research to ensure our wilderness areas are protected, but the notion that they be denied to all but the city-based environmental yuppie must be resisted.

We also need to reassess the invasive and costly implementation of the new State environmental planning policy 46. This ridiculous piece of legislation is an unnecessary threat to the economic viability of our farming community. Do these people not already have enough obstacles to hurdle in the form of high interest rates, flood, fire, drought and the tyranny of distance? In conclusion, I have no doubt that my own values will be tested during the forthcoming political debates in this Chamber. During such times I will not have to reach for some manual containing guidelines or regulations on what is the right or wrong action to take. All I will have to do is ask myself if the action I take will assist me to retain the trust and respect of my mates, many of whom are in the gallery today - people with whom I have shared challenging experiences in the army, in the outback, over the Kokoda Trail and in the community, people whose mateship and respect I treasure more than anything else - the type of people I am honoured to serve as their parliamentary representative in this House. Mr President, and fellow honourable members, I thank you for your indulgence in allowing me to address you in this House, and I look forward to working with you to build a better State and a better Australia.