



# Legislative Council

## Budget Estimates And Related Papers

12/11/91

### Hansard

### Extract

**The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER** [5.51]: First I congratulate the President, the Hon. M. F. Willis, upon his election to the presidency of this ancient House of Parliament. I thank him, honourable members and all officers and staff of the Legislative Council and indeed the Parliament for the assistance and advice given me during my settling-in period as a new member of this the Fiftieth Parliament. I take this opportunity also to thank the President's predecessor, the Hon. J. R. Johnson, for the courtesies he extended to me while he was President when frequently I visited the parliamentary precincts in my previous role as General Secretary of the National Party.

At the last election a wedge of National Party Legislative Councillors retired. I place on the record my own and my party's thanks to each of them for having served the party and country people so passionately and sincerely in this place. Thanks go to the Hon. Judith Jakins, a pioneer, for example, in moving remote communities to organised political action and improving access of isolated children to better education opportunities. I thank also Gentleman Jack, as we call him, the Hon. Jack Doohan, O.B.E., who prior to his election to this place was a notable figure in our pastoral and other primary industries. I acknowledge a special friend of mine and former State Chairman of the National Party, the Hon. Richard Killen of the Hunter Valley, who, among other things, is a champion breeder of Lincoln Red cattle as well as a constant advocate for the other reds of the Hunter. Since the general election the Legislative Council received, due to ill health, the resignation of the father of the House, its distinguished Deputy President and Chairman of Committees, the Hon. Sir Adrian Solomons of Tamworth. He was another former State Chairman of the National Party, as well as a former Federal President of the National Party.

It was as a junior clerk working in the legal fraternity of Tamworth that I became very familiar with the name of the Hon. L.A. Solomons, as he then was. Not long after that I joined the staff of the Australian Country Party at its New South Wales headquarters. At that time Sir Adrian was the Country Party's State Chairman, working in tandem with the then General Secretary, the incomparable Colonel Bill Ford, O.B.E.. I am sure that all members of the Legislative Council who served in previous Parliaments would appreciate that Sir Adrian's brilliance in the art of chairmanship was exceptionally valuable to his party at that time. It was a time when, like now, country people were sinking in what was called the rural crisis. To me, the Hon. Sir Adrian Solomons was not only one of the greats of my party; he was not only an outstanding legislator; he was not only a distinguished Presiding Officer of this House of Parliament. Sir Adrian guaranteed wise counsel. He was a friend to all of us. He was someone upon whom you could lean your life. We wish Sir Adrian well.

I join previous speakers in congratulating all other members of the class of 1991, the new members of the Fiftieth Parliament, upon their election and their first speeches. It is appropriate also that I congratulate some of my National Party colleagues upon their

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various appointments. First, congratulations are in order to the Hon. Robert Webster upon his election as leader of the National Party in the Legislative Council, an office he already fills with great distinction; to the Hon. D. J. Gay who in the space of a couple of weeks was elected State Chairman of our party and Deputy President of this House; and to the Hon. R. T. M. Bull who, as the Minister is fond of telling us, is doing a brilliant job as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for School Education and Youth Affairs, taking a special interest, of course, in country education. I offer best wishes for the parliamentary careers of my recently elected National Party colleagues, the Hon. D. F. Moppett of the Far West, and the Hon. L. D. W. Coleman of the Central West.

Some honourable members might recall Gregory Peck's portrayal of Atticus Finch in the film based on the Pulitzer Prize winning novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. One February Atticus successfully took aim at the neighbourhood dog, which was afflicted with rabies, coming down the street. Well, one February while the Hon. D. F. Moppett was New South Wales Chairman of the National Party we had a political equivalent. The Hon. D. F. Moppett was the person in our party who was the Atticus in the confused world of conservative politics in 1987. He was the one who was willing to go out on the street and take a sure aim at the bizarre "Joh for PM" campaign in the name of the Federal Coalition and the New South Wales National Party. Hopefully, history books will properly recognise his sane role in those crazy days. I am sure that all members will have noticed already that the Hon. D. F. Moppett has a lot of fight left in him for his second stint in this place, and they can be assured that all of his fights will be for honourable causes.

I am proud to have been elected as a National Party member of this Parliament - 70 years after the first members of the Progressive Party, as those pioneering members of the Country Party and more latterly the National Party were known, burst upon the parliamentary scene on behalf of country people. I am privileged to serve my party in the parliamentary sphere in pursuit of its statement of beliefs. And I am proud to be part of a team of extremely dedicated, hard-working and decent parliamentary servants of the people of this State. The National Party team in the 1990s is as it has always been. It is the most stable team in the Parliament. It is the most close-knit team in the Parliament. And, importantly, its present composition reflects the changed demography of non-metropolitan New South Wales. The National Party's utterly solid performance at the last New South Wales general election was in keeping with that throughout most of its history. The Labor Party, which until very recent times had a natural constituency among certain bands of rural workers, could not in 78 per cent of rural and regional electorates at the last general election scrape up more than one-third of the primary votes. The Liberal Party, typically, has had a roller-coaster electoral history in this State. The 1991 election result was the rule rather than the exception. The National Party, which was meant to disappear off the face of the political map, or, at the very least, the long

North Coast stretch of the map, repeated history and confounded its confounded attackers.

History shows that all of our sitting members were returned, that all the North Coast seats were held and for the first time in history we picked up some of the South Coast as well. We of the National Party are going to keep on keeping on well into the next century. This is my first opportunity to comment upon the work and report of the Joint Select Committee Upon Gun Law Reform upon which I had the privilege to serve, along with representatives of each grouping in both Houses of this Parliament. When Sir Adrian Solomons, who represented a generation of membership of the upper House, made his maiden speech here more than two decades ago he said this:

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... I feel there has developed in Australia particularly a tendency to denigrate the situation of members of Parliament within our community, to make fun of them, and to gibe at them for no better reason than that they are members of Parliament. I believe that this does not do justice to those particular people as a race, nor does it do justice to the institution and values of Parliament as a whole. In the years that I have been associated with my political party I have had the opportunity to observe the self-sacrifice and self-discipline with which members of my party have approached their task while representing the electors of New South Wales. I know for a fact that this particular remark might well be applied to members of the other great political parties.

Some things do not change much, but I concur with those remarks. Gun laws were meant to be too hot for this Parliament to handle; too tough a nut to crack by an all party parliamentary committee; too difficult to come to any really worthwhile results in the brief timespan available to the committee to do its work. Well, the cynics outside were wrong. There is probably a widespread belief that practically all parliamentary committee reports, after drawn out deliberations by the members, are doomed to decay on dusty shelves, the findings to be largely ignored. It is ironic, therefore, that the report of the Joint Select Committee Upon Gun Law Reform, the report of which everybody but everybody had the lowest expectations, is the very one that never got anywhere near a shelf, let alone a dust mite, before it was adopted in principle, virtually in its entirety by the Cabinet. It was central to the Australia-wide consensus reached on this vexed subject at the recent Australian Police Ministers Council meeting and will form an important part of the agenda for the forthcoming Special Premiers Conference, if it is not aborted.

It is to be hoped that, with such urgent national problems as the dreadful level of unemployment in this country, the need to tackle the challenges of new federalism, and the desire to follow up on the commitment made by all the governments in our Federation at last year's Special Premiers Conference to try to reduce the incidence of violence in our society, the Special Premiers Conference does go ahead. It is to be hoped that it is not fouled up, abandoned, because of the leadership crisis, the confusion and the chaos that now beleaguers the Federal Labor Government. The gun law reform committee's membership ranged across the whole spectrum of contributors to the debate that raged in the wake of the terrible shooting massacre at Strathfield.

Having been brought up on the land, having had a crack shot as a father, having three hunting, shooting and fishing brothers and having a mother and sister who would not hurt a fly, I guess I am typical of many women in the National Party. As a woman member of the Australian House of Parliament that has a higher proportion of women members than any other, I would like to put in a plug that in the National Party we have always had more women involved in our party than is the case with any of the other political parties. I guess then I was probably right in the middle of the gun law debate. It was interesting talking to the various members of my family - that is my wonderful and natural family as well as my extended family in the great organisation that is the National Party - about the issues central to the gun law debate, a debate in which they were all naturally interested. Their consensus in favour of a broader debate in this day and age is perhaps summarised by the rest of the story about Atticus Finch's shooting activities. Until he shot that mad dog, Atticus Finch's two children were unaware that their father had had "Ol' One-Shot" as his nickname. If he shot 15 times and hit 14 doves, he would complain about wasting ammunition. His son asked his aunt why Atticus now never went hunting. She said:

If your father's anything, he's civilised in his heart. Marksmanship's a gift of God, a talent - oh, you have to practise to make it perfect, but shootin's different from playing the piano or the like. I think maybe he put his gun down when he realised God had given him an unfair

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advantage over most living things. I guess he decided he wouldn't shoot till he had to, and he had to today.

The National Party staunchly and successfully defends the need for farmers and various other categories of shooters to have firearms and, depending on need, some high powered weapons at that. And it must be said it did not take much power of persuasion to get that message accepted across-the-board on that committee. Reasonable discussion was generally the order of the day for the committee. But in the modern National Party, where rednecks do not rule, that is not the end of the debate; that is not the end of our responsibility to those who are of special concern to us, the people of rural and regional New South Wales. There is not a mother on the land who has a teenage or young adult son and whose family is stricken with this latest and most grim rural depression who does not know about one of the most awful of gun deaths statistics; the one about the vulnerability of young country males, depressed about the prospects of emerging from the economic depression, depressed about his and his family's chances of surviving on the land they love, and anxious to the extent that suicide by shotgun might be the only answer.

In the rural crisis of 20 years ago there was no such thing as a rural counsellor or a hotline service giving advice to these troubled people. In 1991 the National Party, the country part of the coalition Government, makes sure there is. It is sincerely hoped that the gun law reform committee's recommendations, concentrating as they do on putting distance in time and space between the potential user of a firearm and a potential victim, be it in the context of suicides, accidental deaths or domestic and neighbourhood violence, when implemented shortly by this Government will indeed reduce the incidence of violence in our society, especially that which occurs in the heat of the moment or when things are not going well. The National Party was more than happy to contribute to that important set of recommendations and I enjoyed working with colleagues from all political backgrounds on that project. Perhaps when someone else makes his or her first speech in this House in another 20 years' time it might be able to be said that not all parliamentary committees are created useless. Perhaps it might be able to be said that we helped to create, as someone else might put it, a kinder and gentler New South Wales.

For the whole of its history the National Party has been the party most genuinely interested in decentralisation and taking the stress of burgeoning populations away from the metropolitan centres. In his first policy speech as parliamentary leader at Grafton in January 1922, the father of my party in this Parliament, Sir Michael Bruxner, on the same platform with his remarkable Federal parliamentary party equivalent, Sir Earle Page, spoke of the need to populate country areas. And, of course, they spoke of the need for country people to receive their fair share of the services provided by governments.

Years later the combination of leaders of my party, the likes of Sir Charles Cutler, Sir John Fuller and Sir Michael's son, the Hon. Tim Bruxner, along with decentralisation proponents such as the former member for Bathurst, Clive Osborne, set in place decentralisation programs, some of which have been added to and enhanced by this latest coalition Government. These programs have dramatically improved the quality of life in and around, and expanded the population of, regional centres in this State and, through healthy competition between towns and cities, stimulated growth in others. Clive Osborne, who studied decentralisation programs overseas, quoted the father of new towns in Great Britain, Ebenezer Howard, who said:

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There are in reality not only, as is so constantly assumed, two alternatives - town life and country life - but a third alternative, in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town, with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination.

Having lived in Bathurst and watched its progress over many years and returning there now as this Legislative Council's representative on the Board of Governors of Charles Sturt University, the Mitchell campus of which is located there, I am sure that the vision and courage of those Country Party men have meant that the quality of life for the older and the newer citizens of the region is markedly, dramatically better these days because of the efforts of those parliamentarians. The stimulus to all sorts of improvements in services and infrastructure there is obvious to the most casual observer, and a new generation of National Party parliamentarians draw inspiration from the progress made there and in other parts of non-metropolitan New South Wales. Apart from that, the place looks great. It is a pleasure to walk or drive down any of the city's four main streets. Times are tough; but it is a city renewed when you compare it to the photographs of rows of boarded-up shopfronts in the mid sixties, before the Country Party and Liberal Party got back into government. Home, to me, is Tamworth - another city that is feeling tough times when only as recently as midway through this year it was all economic systems go. When Lieutenant John Oxley, having departed from Bathurst on another of his expeditions, reported to Governor Lachlan Macquarie on 2nd September, 1818, upon his discovery of the Peel Valley, in which Tamworth came to be situated, he said:

It would be impossible to find a finer or more luxuriant country than the Peel River waters . . . its extent is unknown, but it is certainly not less than 60 miles, whilst the breadth of the vale is on a medium about 20 miles. The space between the bounding hills is not altogether level, but rises gently into inequalities, and, independently of the river, is well watered; the grass was most luxuriant; the timber good and not too thick; in short, no place in the world can offer more advantages to the industrious settler.

Right now the hills are not as green as they usually are around this time of the year, as the city normally receives most of its rain in summer, but not this summer - yet. But the local citizenry is extremely determined, imbued with a private enterprise philosophy to market the many advantages their city offers to people who can be freed from the stresses of metropolitan life. Talking to the people of Tamworth you can feel that they will see through the hard times and the Tamworth district will continue to be a better and better place for people to live and to bring up their families. Travelling throughout the country areas of New South Wales - and some formerly deprived parts of the capital as well - you would have to be terribly visually impaired not to notice the extraordinary progress that has been made in improving the quality of life of the people of the State as a result of just one term of this Liberal Party-National Party Government. That is not rhetoric. That is real.

It would be great if, in 1995 when this Government is winding up its second term in office and getting ready for its third, we could only get John Oxley back to see what the industrious settlers have attractively achieved in many of the sites he explored - with, it is fair to say, a lot of help from the National Party and Country Party parliamentarians for those areas over the intervening years. I said earlier that I feel honoured to have the opportunity to serve the National Party in this Parliament; to aid in giving legislative effect to the statement of our beliefs. We in the National Party believe in equal opportunity. We believe in freedom of speech, religion, movement, philosophy; freedom of assembly, and equality and justice for all before the law. We are unabashed supporters of our constitutional monarchy; we uphold the Westminster system

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and will expose any attempt to subvert it in this Fiftieth Parliament. We are supporters of the three tiers of government.

The National Party is, of course, a believer in private ownership and minimum government interference in people's lives. Like those who articulated the early phraseology of this 1990s version of our philosophy, Sir Michael Bruxner and Sir Earle Page, we believe that initiative should be rewarded and that those prepared to work the hardest should reap rewards that match their efforts. We are the low tax party. We are for smaller government and encouraging individual economic freedom. As highlighted earlier in this contribution, we are the true believers in the balanced development of our economy and the decentralisation of population and services. We believe in the family unit as the best basis for a strong and stable society. We believe that the young, the aged and the disadvantaged are entitled to the support of society and that they have the right to live in comfort and dignity. We believe that all Australians, no matter where they live, have the right to the best possible education. We believe that all Australians should help to foster a spirit of national pride and Australian identity. And we believe, perhaps now more fervently than ever, in the need to be ever vigilant for the protection of the individual's rights. The generation of rather young National Party parliamentarians currently serving in the New South Wales Parliament passionately holds these beliefs, and I am happy to be part of a team that is so committed to translating those words into action.