



Legislative Council

Budget Estimates And Related Papers

28/05/96

Hansard

Extract

The Hon. P. T. PRIMROSE [8.44]: I support the New South Wales Labor Government's 1996-97 budget. However, as this is my first speech in this place, I seek the indulgence of the House to make a few personal comments before moving on to address the budget. I became a member of this House as the result of the vacancy left by Paul O'Grady. I know it is a cliché, but while I am here to fill the vacancy left by Paul, I can never hope to replace him. Paul brought to this place special skills and talents that he used for the benefit of the labour movement and the broader community of this State. I deeply respect him for his courage and strength, and my best wishes and those of his many other friends will always be with him. I feel very privileged to be a representative of the Australian Labor Party in this Parliament and, like Paul O'Grady, to also share in the traditions and the strengths of the New South Wales Left. I feel equally privileged to have been the ALP member for Camden in the Legislative Assembly from 1988 to 1991, having won that marginal seat, I believe, because of our strong campaign against guns.

While a member in the other place I had the privilege of working with someone I regard as having been the best representative member that I have ever met: Bill Lovelee, who was the honourable member for Bass Hill. Bill respected the forms and traditions of the Parliament, but also regarded them as things that first and foremost should work to promote the good of the electorate and not the other way around. Bill was irreverent when the situation required, felt uncomfortable with people in wigs and gowns, and would fight tooth and nail for his constituents. Bill represented everything I believe a member of Parliament should aspire to be - not too serious about the froth and bubble, but deadly serious about the people and causes he was here to represent. At the end of my time in this place if I am also remembered that way I will be very proud and well satisfied. There are many, many other people that I would like to thank for their help and support over the last few years. I will not even try to list them all, and I know my parliamentary colleagues already know how much I appreciate their assistance.

First and foremost I have to thank my two closest friends - my wife, Jan, and my son, David. Without their tolerance, strength and understanding over the last few years life would literally have been impossible. I love them more than words can ever express. I also deeply appreciate the love and support of my parents - my mother's encouragement and faith, and my late father's quiet love and guidance. As for my mother-in-law, Nancy Essex, she has always helped far above and beyond the call of duty. Indeed, she helped me so much during the last State election that I felt obliged to include her support in the non-financial section of my return to the Electoral Funding Authority. In my local area I am proud to be Secretary of the Camden Branch of the Australian Labor Party. I am deeply indebted to all Camden branch members, in particular to the president of that branch, Ray Burcher, and his wife, Laurie. I feel very privileged to have as friends branch members such as the Brown family, the Oliver family, David Waring, Harry and Janet Stait-Gardner, Doug Cliffe, Marcel Schondelmaier, Kerry and Ursula Hatton, and many others. In other local ALP branches I have found longstanding friendships and support amongst people such as Councillor Michael Banasik, Rodney Cavalier, Mary McTigue, Vince Hewson, Peter Roach, Robert Gibbons, Mick Fell, Dave O'Neill, Kaldoun Hajaj, Greg O'Donohue, Councillor Paul Blyton and many others.

I am also deeply grateful to many people in the broader labour movement, friends such as Anthony Albanese, Damian O'Connor, Luke Foley, Carmel Tebbutt, Tim Gartrell, Jo Kaar, Jeannette McHugh, Bruce Childs, John Faulkner, Nareen Young, Daryl Melham, Michael Samaris, Paul Matters, Maggie Deahm, Neville Hilton and Lenore Craven. I gained a number of good friends during my time with the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association of Australasia and I am particularly grateful to have comrades such as Steve Dixon and Lorraine Usher. I also cannot forget to say a special thank you to my friend Debra Ferguson and her husband, Paul, and to other colleagues in Liverpool, such as Alex Sanchez and Wendy Waller. I am also deeply grateful to the trade union movement. As does the coalition, I recognise also that the strength of the Labor Party lies in its trade union base. I mention union colleagues like those in the Amalgamated Manufacturing Workers Union: George Campbell, Doug Cameron, John McCarthy, Brian Fraser, Brian Beer, Paul Bastion, Dave Oliver and many other comrades.

I am grateful also to Tom Hannan and the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union; Robert Coombs, Jim Donovan and Barry Robson in the Maritime Union; Vicki Telfer, Wendy Caird and

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the Community and Public Sector Union; Maurie O'Sullivan and the Public Service Association; others like Bruce Grimshaw, Alison Peters and the Australian Services Union; Chris Read and the United Firefighters; and Ian McCarthy, Col Cooper and the Communications Electrical Plumbing Union. Over the years and in many campaigns I have deeply appreciated the support and advice of Andrew Ferguson, John Maitland, Gavin Hillier and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union; and Chris Raper and the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union.

I now turn to the budget. It gives me a great sense of pride to be able to boast that social justice is one of the New South Wales Labor Government's four key budgetary themes; the others being commitments to economic development, environmental protection and financial responsibility. Put simply, social justice is the goal and process of achieving a fairer society; it is not an unachievable fairy-floss notion. It is real and it is measurable. As the Government's Social Justice Budget Statement states:

The major aim of the Government's social justice strategy is to enhance equity between individuals and groups in our community. The Government aims to ensure that all people, but especially those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged, have genuine opportunities and the means to make choices in everyday life.

The first New South Wales Social Justice Budget Statement was released with Labor's budget last year. The second

statement, which has been released with this budget, provides an account of the outcomes of the previous year's program. As new statements are released annually with each successive Labor budget, the social justice strategy will be refined to ensure that policy outcomes, programs and services are stated in terms of measurable social justice outcomes to be achieved. The Government's social justice strategy is based on the application of four social justice principles, which were determined by the Cabinet committee on social justice, itself a major initiative that shows the Government's commitment to this issue. These four principles are: equity - there should be fairness in the distribution of resources, particularly for those in need; rights - equality of rights should be established and promoted, and there should be approved accountability for decision makers; access - all people should have fairer access to the economic resources, services and rights essential to improving the quality of life; and participation - all people should have the fullest possible opportunity to genuinely participate in the community and be consulted on decisions which affect their lives.

No-one thinks that achieving these objectives will be easy. But the New South Wales Labor Government has committed itself to doing just that in an open, detailed and transparent policy. These principles will underpin a major social justice directions paper to be released later this year. The Government has also established a social justice reference group as a source of community advice on social justice issues. These issues will become even more important over the next few years as the Federal coalition Government cuts back on the programs that it provides, leaving the States to pick up unfunded and underfunded service areas. Equally, as the national competition policy increasingly stretches its tentacles into all aspects of our lives, the importance of maintaining social justice in the administration of public policy through USOs, community service obligations - CSOs - and consumer involvement becomes an even greater priority.

I have chosen to focus on this issue of social justice in my first speech because I regard it as one of the key areas that differentiates Labor governments from conservative governments. It shows the real policy cleavages between a progressive party that can conceive initiatives like native title legislation and then bring them into reality, and a coalition that can forever only look backwards, can aspire only ever to climb hills and never mountains, and can lament golden ages that never really existed. I look forward to being part of a State Labor government over the years ahead that develops a positive and genuine social justice agenda that will make a real difference to the people of New South Wales.