

Adjournment Speech PULP MILL DEBATE – Response to Leaders Speech

[7.14 p.m.]

**Mr MARTIN** (Elwick) - Charles S. Lauer said - and I quote:

'Leaders don't force people to follow - they invite them on a journey'.

And the Civil Rights Leader, Jesse Jackson, said, and I quote:

'Leadership has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together'.

Madam Deputy President, these sentiments I do very, very strongly agree with, which is why after much thought over the weekend I have chosen to take this opportunity to revisit the final words uttered in this Chamber in the pulp mill debate. I am sure everyone in this Chamber like me is pulped out and accordingly just wants to move on to other business but that in itself was the problem with those final five to 10 minutes of the pulp mill debate.

**Mr Parkinson** - Is this the last word?

**Mr MARTIN** - This is my last word but I would hope that it is not your last word because I would like you to respond. I understand that we do not have the opportunity to debate tonight so I do hope you take up the opportunity on another occasion.

As I said, that in itself is the problem with those final five to 10 minutes of the pulp mill debate, which are recorded in *Hansard* for posterity and which I believe should not go unanswered. I think the only thing Australians hate more than a bad loser is a bad winner and that is what we got, the words of a bad winner rather than the words of a great leader. Instead of words chosen with grace and humility, words chosen to bring sides together, words chosen to attempt to commence the bridging of the great divide which has been created in our Tasmanian community by the Government's ham-fisted handling of the pulp mill issue -

**Mr Parkinson** - I wouldn't reflect on a vote, if I were you.

**Mr MARTIN** - what we got was a vicious, spiteful, vindictive, verbal assault on many ordinary Tasmanians who are not here to defend themselves, and it is with these people in mind -

**Mr Parkinson** - That's a load of rubbish - an absolute load of rubbish.

**Madam DEPUTY PRESIDENT** - Order.

**Mr MARTIN** - Madam Deputy President, last time I was in this position on an adjournment debate the President ruled that we could not debate and he ruled that interjections were a form of debate.

**Madam DEPUTY PRESIDENT** - That is correct.

**Mr MARTIN** - I welcome you to speak on the adjournment tomorrow night.

**Mr Parkinson** - I wouldn't give you the pleasure.

**Mr MARTIN** - As I said, it is with these people in mind I have chosen to revisit the Leader's closing words from last Thursday's debate because, quite frankly, his final words were too appalling, too lacking in compassion and understanding and far too disrespectful to be considered worthy of being the final words in what has been a long, gruelling but in the main a well-considered and respectful debate -

**Mr Parkinson** - Full of fact, which obviously disturbed you.

**Madam DEPUTY PRESIDENT** - Order.

**Mr MARTIN** - by the honourable members in this Chamber.

So on behalf of the many thousands of Tasmanians who were attacked by the Leader, I intend to respond and in fact challenge some of the more outrageous statements made by the honourable Leader, first of all and most importantly his extraordinary attack on the intelligence of thousands of ordinary Tasmanians. Let me quote the Leader:

'What concerns me, Mr President, is that so many genuine people have been hoodwinked into believing the lies and misleading propaganda of the Greens and the Wilderness Society.'

**Mr Parkinson** - You have a very broad definition of the word 'attack' I have noticed.

**Mr MARTIN** - Madam Deputy President, I cannot believe any intelligent, thinking person could make that claim and this assertion is seemingly based on one silly little personal anecdote conveyed to the Leader by a family member.

Madam Deputy President, over the past five months I, like many of the people in this Chamber, have had thousands of personal interactions with these ordinary Tasmanians, either face to face or by letter, e-mail or phone call. Let me tell you, that is people from all walks of life - young and old, wealthy and financially struggling, people with academic qualifications as well as those without. They have been lawyers, doctors, factory workers, teachers, pensioners, businesspeople, public servants, scientists, engineers, tourism operators, unionists and, believe it or not, not only people who are members of the Liberal Party or the Greens party but people who are members of the ALP, including members of the PLP and, believe it or not, even members of State Cabinet and so on. They have been people from all walks of life, all expressing their disapproval and opposition to the process and the lack of good governance and accountability which has been and will be forever the lasting legacy of this Government's handling of the pulp mill issue. According to the Leader, we are expected to believe that these genuine people were apparently so stupid, so incapable of listening and engaging in the debate and sifting through the arguments for and against that they were, quote:

'♦ hoodwinked into believing the lies and the misleading propaganda of the Greens and the Wilderness Society.'

I think the Leader's comments were demonstrably incorrect -

**Mr Parkinson** - Even the journos didn't put this spin on it.

**Mr MARTIN** - and he should immediately apologise to the 60-odd per cent of ordinary Tasmanians whom I believe he insulted with his comment. Furthermore, if we were for just for one moment to perhaps foolishly accept the Leader's comment as being accurate, let us think that notion through. Given that the Government has spent millions of taxpayer dollars through the activities of the Pulp Mill Task Force and the extraordinary marketing campaign promoting the development of the pulp mill, millions of dollars of taxpayers' money dishing up one-sided propaganda over three years, let us just assume for a moment that the Leader's comments were right. What sort of performance indicator is that for the Pulp Mill Task Force and the Government's communications office, the advertising agency involved, the staff in the Premier's office and everyone else involved in these government campaigns supporting the pulp mill?

Despite all of these taxpayers' dollars and all this effort by so many people, according to the Leader they seemingly failed. Supposedly it was not enough to prevent so many genuine people from being hoodwinked into believing the lies and the misleading propaganda of the Greens and the Wilderness Society. Madam Acting President, all I can say is that it is unbelievable.

This brings me to the extraordinary attack by the Leader on the Greens and the Wilderness Society. He accuse them of 'dishonest behaviour', and then further on, 'lies and misleading propaganda'. And again:

'... lies and the misinformation that they continually peddle to innocent members of public.'

I believe to use parliamentary privilege to accuse people of being liars and to reflect on members from another House without producing one scrap of evidence to support the claims should not be allowed to go unchallenged. I simply call on the Leader to table or to outline to this Council whatever evidence he has to support his allegation that the Greens and the Wilderness Society have been guilty of dishonest behaviour. Surely I hope there is more substance to his claims of lying and dishonest behaviour than the science argument that the Leader used in his letter to the editor in today's *Mercury*. After all, I think we have all been subjected to duelling scientists at 10 paces over this entire debate. There are many scientists who disagree with the Leader's assertions in today's *Mercury* and surely you would not accuse people of being liars simply because they believe one scientist over another. Only when the Leader tables his evidence to support his allegation will we and the Tasmanian public be in a position to assess the veracity of his allegations.

**Mr Parkinson** - All you've got to do is open your eyes - and your mind.

**Mr MARTIN** - Me, open my mind? Good one.

To me there has been an awful amount of competing spin from all stakeholders in this debate. This unfortunately is what politics in this age of mass media has been reduced to: 10-second grabs on TV, glossy brochures, TV and newspaper ads with lots of one-liners, many of which sometimes stretch not only the imagination but also realism just a tad. For example, need I remind the Leader of the Government's pro-pulp mill brochure? I think it was distributed to every householder in Tasmania featuring this infamous promise, and I quote:

**Madam DEPUTY PRESIDENT** - Order. I just point out that you are tending to get back into the debate rather than your disturbance about some comments made by the Leader, so I have to caution you in your comments to attempt to stay out of the debate that this House has already had.

**Mr MARTIN** - I am certainly not debating the pulp mill issue; I accept the decision of the Parliament. I am dealing with the allegations made by the Leader in his speech last week. The promise made in the Premier's letter -

**Mr Parkinson** - Sounds like a letter from Christine Milne.

**Mr MARTIN** - I will come to her in a minute. I quote:

'Economic experts have told us that each household in Tasmania is likely to have \$870 extra each year to spend because of the pulp mill ... In other words, it means it will make life easier for many Tasmanian families.'

As I said in my speech in March regarding this, this is seriously bad spin. The \$870 may very well be the average economic benefit per number of households, but what the letter promised was that every household was likely to receive an extra \$870 each year to spend and we all know that is not going to happen.

**Ms Ritchie** - I have to say that I didn't read it that way.

**Mr MARTIN** - That is a direct quote. I do not know any other way you can read it.

**Madam DEPUTY PRESIDENT** - Order. I again caution the member. You are drifting back into the debate, rather than your initial criticism of comments made of the Leader, and I cannot see a link between a pamphlet, \$870 and your comments to the Leader. So please bring it back to that process.

**Mr MARTIN** - The point I am making, Madam Deputy President, is that some people might say that this also was deliberately misleading, whereas I would prefer to think that it was just badly-written spin by the author of brochure which went unchallenged by the minister responsible. Whatever it was, I personally do not know, but the connection and the point I am making is that people in glass houses should not throw stones.

There are lots of other promises and statements made by all parties in this. The conservation side of the argument, the proponents, the Government - everyone is guilty of spinning the facts in this matter and that is the point I am making. Were all of these statements true at the time they were made? Some would argue yes and some would argue no. The answer, I suspect, will vary, depending upon which side of the political debate you are on. That is the reality. To me, this is the folly of the Leader's attack on Senator Milne for talking about doing whatever it takes to stop the pulp mill. So what? How is that any different to the Premier's closing statement last week in support of the pulp mill approval, when he said, and I quote:

'I support the motion with every last bone in my body.'

I do not think anyone would question the veracity of that statement. The Premier has certainly indicated that. I applaud both of them. Both were expressing their views on a subject from their different ideological perspectives. Personally, I do not agree with either of them. Why? Because, from my ideological perspective, I am somewhere in the middle. But, Madam Deputy President, I do respect their right to have a different opinion to me.

This brings me the Leader's attack on the media -

**Ms Ritchie** - You would not like the comments from the honourable member for Rosevears on the debate then, would you?

**Madam DEPUTY PRESIDENT** - It is not a debate, thank you. Move on.

**Mr MARTIN** - supposedly for being pro-Greens. He even attacked the *Four Corners* program, which I think most people commented on as being an extremely balanced chronology of events leading up to the Parliament's vote in the process. Even a leading spokesman for the forestry industry agreed that it was balanced. The Leader's basic premise was that anti-mill advocates were supported by, quote:

'◆ a story-hungry media with a tendency to give credence to Green lies in order to generate more stories.'

This was followed by the extraordinary claim that, quote:

'In a political system where the Greens get 10 to 20 per cent of the vote why is it that their nonsense gets 80 per cent of the headlines?'

Again, if these incredible statements are true, my first question is, what does this say of the performance benchmarks of the myriad government spin-doctors? According to the Leader, one would presume that clearly they must be underperforming.

**Ms Ritchie** - You can't pick a fight with people who buy ink by the tonne, they say.

**Mr MARTIN** - The Leader's assertion is rubbish. I challenge the Leader to provide any statistical evidence to support his claim that the Greens get 80 per cent of the headlines. The Leader has basically accused the media of being complicit in spreading lies. Having had over 20 years' experience in dealing with the media, despite some occasionally frustrating misreporting, the occasional typo and odd quote taken out of context, there has been only one instance when I have ever had reason to doubt the honesty of a journalist. Ironically, that particular journalist now works for the Government. The reality is that journalists and subeditors occasionally get it wrong. I have learned over the years to go with the flow.

Madam Deputy President, for the Leader to suggest that the media have been biased on this issue I believe is a classic case of shooting the messenger. On the other hand, it is the media's role to ask questions and, on this particular issue, I sense a degree of frustration from a number of journalists because there are so many questions that have been asked that have still not been adequately answered by the Government.

Finally, Madam Deputy President, this brings me to the Leader's *pièce de résistance*. In referring to the RPDC process, the Leader said - and I will quote him in full:

'I believe we were all too hooked on a *laissez-faire* approach, too hooked on open transparency, too hooked on public consultation and not hooked enough on ministerial responsibility. That is not to say I do not believe in each of those things - the *laissez-faire* approach, open transparency and public consultation. I am not saying that they are not important. They are. I am saying we were too hooked on them. There needs to be a balance.

The approach needs to be more balanced with in-built protection against the process abuse. There has been a lot of process abuse along the way here.'

Madam Deputy President, what on earth does this contradictory statement actually mean? It certainly requires some clarification from the Leader because, if it reflects government policy at any time in the future, the ramifications on the planning system, the RPDC, the project of State significance process and the general governance of the State generally are enormous.

I ask, does the Leader understand the meaning of *laissez faire*? The *Oxford Dictionary* describes it as 'a noun meaning a policy of non-interference, especially extension by governments from interfering in the workings of the free market.'

I do not think anyone would accept this as a criticism of the RPDC but, believe me, there are thousands of Tasmanians who believe it to be fair criticism of the fast-tracking process we finished up with.

The other quote, 'too hooked on open transparency, too hooked on public consultation', what absolutely extraordinary comments from a senior member of the Government, and these raise a lot

of questions. Do the Premier and Cabinet support these views? If so, is this a new policy of government to have less transparency and less consultation?

**Mr Parkinson** - Is this your application for Greens' membership?

**Mr MARTIN** - I knew you would say that - I was waiting for it. Anyone who disagrees is a Green. Is there any intention to take these components out of LUPAA and the RPDC and POSS processes?

Madam Deputy President, I could go on. This has been a lengthy **adjournment speech** and I thank honourable members for their patience but I did feel strongly that the Leader's comments required challenging and I look forward to the Leader accepting the challenges I have issued and responding tomorrow night.

**Mr Parkinson** - I couldn't be bothered.