

The Rev. LANCE ARMSTRONG (Bass) - In speaking against the motion that is before us at this time I would like to begin by explaining to the House why I decided to stand as a candidate for parliament.

Over the fifteen years or so that I have lived in Tasmania I have been continually involved in politics, acting as a pressure agent - on some occasions as an individual; on other occasions as a member of one community-based organisation or another. During that time I have been critical of governments of both the Liberal and the Labor persuasions. By 1988-89 however I had become so disturbed by the direction in which this State was being taken, and so incensed by the confrontationist style of politics that the then Government was pursuing, that I decided it was time I had to do more than criticise. So I decided to stand as a candidate for parliament and here I am.

I was not elected to parliament because there is something intrinsically special about me. I was successful because a sizeable proportion of the people living in Bass were also disturbed about the direction in which this State was being taken and also incensed by the confrontationist style of politics being pursued by the Government of that time. That sort of attitude was also reflected in the vote that was recorded in the other four electorates.

It is clear to me that the former Liberal Government lost office because its members were simply out of touch with the way the people of Tasmania were thinking and certainly lacking any understanding of their aspirations and desire for a change in direction.

I believe that the correctness of this interpretation is evidenced in a number of ways. For example, just two nights before election day we had a number of the then Liberal ministers categorically stating via the public medium of television - and I am talking about the Peter Couchman show - that the Liberal Party was going to win a handsome majority, and that did not happen. Then, having lost the election, the members of the Parliamentary Liberal Party fought tooth and nail to hang onto power and in so doing they continued to use the very tactics which had led to their downfall. It was clear to me at that time that the members of the Parliamentary Liberal Party simply did not understand why the people had rejected them. I do not think they had even accepted that they had been rejected. They had been indulging in confrontationist politics for so long that it appeared to me that they were now regarding it as being compulsory. It is not.

In the short time that I have been sitting in the House here I have listened to a fair amount of personal abuse coming from the Liberal Party's side of the House. I would point out to the members of the Opposition - the two of them who are here anyway - that the era of personal abuse is over. The people of Tasmania have said, 'Enough is enough'. The era is over when terms such as 'idiot', 'political prostitute' and 'Jesus-like character' were acceptable - at least it is over for any parliamentary group that seriously wants to win future elections. The people will not stand for it any longer.

This kind of motion that we are debating now, which is based on rather spurious arguments, also reveals that the members of the Opposition - and I hope the two who are in here today will tell the others later - still have not taken on board the lesson that the people of Tasmania were trying to teach them on 13 May. I find all of the talk about a public loss of confidence in the Government, so-called personal inadequacies of individual members of the Government and doom and gloom to be quite incredible just two months after the change of government. How can the closure of a construction firm like John de Jong Builder (Tas) Pty Ltd be reasonably attributed to a government which is only two months old and has yet to announce the details of its Budget? As for doom and gloom, I remind the members of the Opposition that they set the scene by trying to scare the people of Tasmania, painting those pictures of doom and gloom and saying that it would be like that in the event of their losing office. In so doing I believe they deliberately sought to divide the Tasmanian community - to turn Tasmanians against Tasmanians.

Unfortunately the Honourable Robin Gray is not here tonight and I have to say it in his absence but he, for example, talked incessantly about the instability in government in the event of a Labor government coming into office with the support of the Green Independents. In this way he clearly flagged to the Tasmanian people that he thought that a Labor Green accord was a real possibility so he cannot honestly claim, as he has been trying to do, that the Tasmanian people were caught unawares. The people of Tasmania made a deliberate, well-considered choice and no matter how much the Opposition may play around with statistics the fact remains that it is now in opposition because 53 per cent of the voting people in Tasmania rejected it and its style of government.

The member for Lyons, Mr Gray, also used much language during the election and its aftermath which can charitably be described as flamboyant. For example, he told the people of Tasmania that if the Green Independents gained the balance of power we would be continually holding a gun at the head of the Government. Terms like that may accurately describe the style of the Government which he led for seven years but it bears no relationship to the style, which we have adopted over the past two months and indeed for the future.

In the early hours of the morning I was reading through the rather lengthy text of the motion which has been proposed by the Leader of the Opposition and I was struck by the fact that he is continuing to use an aggressive kind of language. For example, in that motion he has consistently referred to the so-called divisions between the members of the Parliamentary Labor Party and the Green Independents as 'brawling' and again this term reflects a person who thinks confrontationism must always be the norm in the political scene. Certainly our two groups have disagreed in public and I will let members into a secret: we have also disagreed in private.

Members laughing.

Mr ARMSTRONG - But our disagreements have always been verbalised and worked through in a way which is reasonable, mature and above all civilised. I am sure we will continue to disagree on many other issues in the future. However I can assure members of the Opposition that it is possible to disagree without brawling. Disagreements are not necessarily a sign of division nor do they constitute instability; rather they can be expressions of democracy in action - another aspiration which the people of Tasmania hold for their Parliament.

Another term the Leader of the Opposition has used in the motion is 'strong' - to be more specific he has accused the Premier, Michael Field, of failing to provide 'strong leadership'. I suspect that Mr Gray measures strength in terms of a willingness to override other people and a refusal to listen to their points of view. If that is what he means I agree with him, but I do not agree with that interpretation of strength and it is clear to me that Michael Field does not agree either, and it is also clear to me that 53 per cent of the Tasmanian people agree with Michael's and my interpretation of what constitutes real strength.

In his speech last night the Leader of the Opposition made an incredible statement. He claimed that 'the whole of the Tasmanian community has lost confidence in the Government'. Perhaps that was simply loose talk but we do not know that so we will have to take it at its face value. If Mr Gray really believes this to be true it is yet a further sign that he is still out of touch with how a large section of the Tasmanian community is thinking and feeling.

For sure the Opposition continues to maintain support in the community; certainly there are those who would like to see this Government lose office. That is not surprising considering the nature of a democracy and the amount of propaganda the Liberal Party has been putting out over recent months, but the claim that 'the whole of the Tasmanian community has lost confidence in the Government' bears absolutely no relationship to reality. It is ludicrous. My own experience as I have been moving around the community tells me that. Between 13 May and the present complete strangers have been coming up and stopping me to express their enthusiasm for the Labor Green Accord and making statements like, 'The Labor Green

Accord is like a breath of fresh air' and 'I believe we Tasmanians have entered a new golden age' and 'I now find myself living with hope and enthusiasm'. Indeed I have lost count of the number of people who have approached me in this way. In contrast I can count the number of people who have spontaneously accosted me on the street to express negative criticism since the election - it has happened three times.

Let me tell members of the Opposition about the people who are bubbling over with enthusiasm for the new Government. First there are our young people, many of whom were feeling pretty neglected under the previous administration. During the election campaign a mock election was held at Launceston College as an educational exercise and the Independents topped the poll in all five electorates. Indeed that poll eight Independents were 'elected' to parliament. There is a lesson for the opposition members, if only they are willing to learn it. I doubt that they are. I have worked closely with young people throughout the whole of my adult life. I have not yet lost contact with them and the continuing feedback I am receiving from young people is that they are more than happy with the new Government which is based on the Labor Green Accord.

Next there is the Aboriginal community, many members of which also believe that new life has been breathed into the Tasmanian community. Under the previous Government a large section of the Aboriginal community had become totally disillusioned with the political process in this State and, in my view, rightly so. In an article that I wrote for the first edition of the new Independents newsletter I made the statement that under the previous Government's administration the very existence of the Aboriginal community was not even given official recognition. I subsequently received a terse letter from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition - who unfortunately is not here either - in which he accused me of making a blatantly false statement. During the so-called negotiations we had with the Liberals in the immediate post-election period I carefully explained to Honourable Ray Groom the reasoning behind this conclusion of mine. Apparently however this was something else that Mr Groom was unable to comprehend. I have since replied in writing to Mr Groom explaining it all again; however I want to take this opportunity of explaining it to all the members of the House - at least those who are here.

Dr Bates - The others will be listening on their squawk boxes.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Is that what happens?

Under the previous Government, Tasmania was the only Australian State which did not have a ministerial portfolio for Aboriginal affairs. I know the Honourable Ray Groom had responsibility for this area in his role as Minister for Multicultural Affairs. My point however was that, as the indigenous people of this island, the Aboriginal people deserve to be granted the importance of being singled out and I argued that until this occurred, official recognition was not being given to them.

For me the correctness of this interpretation was reinforced by the Honourable Robin Gray's repeated assertion that he was going to treat all Tasmanians alike. In this statement I saw an inability or unwillingness to recognise that Aboriginal culture is unique and that Aboriginal people correspondingly have unique needs and aspirations. Of even greater significance is the way in which the Honourable Robin Gray has consistently referred to the Aboriginal people as being 'people of Aboriginal descent'. This also reveals a complete lack of understanding. Aboriginality is something that should be measured by cultural criteria, not purely by blood descent. Those people who have been nurtured within the Aboriginal culture naturally feel that they are Aboriginal and they should be addressed as such as a matter of courtesy and as a matter of justice.

Dr Bates - Hear, hear.

Mr ARMSTRONG - By way of analogy let me refer to my own situation. I was born and brought up in Australia but my father was an Englishman.

Dr Bates - Hear, hear!

Mr ARMSTRONG - Yet I proudly regard myself, and always have, as an Australian, and I would be most upset if people continually referred to me as, or tried to force onto me the identity of, a person of English descent. So would any other Australian.

Dr Bates - Easy.

Members laughing.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. No interjections from pommies, please.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You are not supposed to interject.

Since the changeover of government a ministerial portfolio for Aboriginal affairs has been created and I believe this official recognition of the Aboriginal community will go a long way towards counteracting the too widespread notion in the Tasmanian white community that there are no longer any Aboriginal people living on this island. Moreover, justice for the Aboriginal community in the form of land rights is also on the way. So as a general statement it can be validly said that the Aboriginal people - certainly those to whom I have spoken - are also pretty happy and supportive of the present Government.

Then there are those people who are greatly concerned for the maintenance and restoration of the natural environment, and the number of people in this category has been rapidly growing over recent years. I thought I had better say that in case the Liberals had not realised it yet. Only last February about twelve thousand people took to the streets to voice their displeasure over a proposed pulpmill which posed a tremendous threat to the natural environment. The then Government did not however take any notice of those people either.

The fact is that the values of many Tasmanians have changed over recent years. Many are now recognising that material affluence and human well-being are not necessarily the same thing. The economy is important, and given a reasonable length of time, I am confident that the Government will be able to correct that. However as one ancient teacher and preacher put it 'Man' - and woman - 'cannot live by bread alone'. This change in values is something else which appears to be beyond the comprehension of the Opposition. During this debate we have heard a great deal about the way the Government is ruining the economy. I reject that. In the search for short-term material growth the economy of this State has already been ruined over the past seven years.

I would like to illustrate this point through the use of another analogy. Anyone who took out continual loans to buy a house, a car and a boat or whatever took his fancy would soon find himself bankrupt a few years down the line and unable to pay off the interest bill let alone the principal, but that is what has been happening in the public domain over the past seven years. Moreover, only last night the Leader of the Opposition indicated that if he were still the Premier he would be taking us further down that track. 'We need more capital works', he said - again a failure to learn from past mistakes.

It is no wonder that many people see the Labor Green Accord as being the saviour of Tasmania - economically, politically, environmentally and socially. It is not true that the whole of the Tasmanian community has lost confidence in the present Government. It still has the solid support of those people who have been given new hope, those who have a vision for Tasmania - that of a society which is just and humane.

Only three months ago 53 per cent of the people voted for a change and I have seen no evidence to suggest that those people have had a change in heart or mind. I have seen no evidence to suggest that the Liberal Opposition has had a change in heart or mind either and that is why I will be voting against this motion.

Mr ROBSON (Bass) - First and foremost I would like to comment on the previous speaker's remarks with regard to Aborigines. I think it is very significant that in the 1963 census there were 63 people who claimed aboriginality but in 1984, I think the last one was, there were 6 500. I will leave it to members to use their own imagination as to why that was.

I would like to talk about World Heritage. At this moment I am speaking for shack owners, farmers, fishermen, people who do not know the conservation act, bushwalkers, photographers, nature lovers, shooters and hunters, including possum hunters - all those people who enjoy the central plateau as I do and many other people in the Chamber who enjoy it with me.

In speaking for them I would like to read a list. It is 120 strong but members will have to bear with me. I have 40 minutes and I am going to subject them to it.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. I wish to inform the honourable member that I am about to hand over the Chair to his son-in-law and I leave him in charge of it. He finally has you where he wants you, Neil.

Members laughing.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Order. The honourable member has five minutes, starting from now.

Members laughing.

Mr ROBSON - I would like to inform the honourable Speaker that is his prerogative.

I was the Chairman of the Central Plateau Select Committee which was formed here, with the consent of the Labor Party and the Liberal Party, to look at the recreational values and the use of resources in that central plateau management area. I am now going to read the names of 120 people because I believe they all must be represented in this debate on World Heritage and no confidence in this Government. They are: the Department of Agriculture; the Antarctic Division; the Australian Deer Association; the Australian Heritage Commission -

Dr Bates - They have no confidence in the Government.

Mr ROBSON - My friend, you were caught lighting fires in a national park, so I do not think you should say too much - the Australian National Sportfishing Association; Geoffrey Axton; Bird; Blakely; Bonney; the Bridgewater Anglers' Association; Dr Robert Brown, MHA; the Burnie Field Naturalist Club; Mr Ian Carins, former President of the Northern Tasmanian Fisheries Association; the Central Highlands Shackowners Association; Mr L. Charlesworth; Mr Francis Chatterton; Mrs M. Chugg; -

Dr Bates - Eleven, twelve -

Mr ROBSON - This chappie always used to complain about interjectors.

Dr Bates - A hundred and eight to go.

Mr ROBSON - He can count too - Frances Cleaver; Charles Crowden; Mr Cubit; Mr Philip Culjen; Mr Nigel Davies of Welman Street; Mr Anthony Dell; the Deloraine Walking Club; Mr Raoul Dixon; the Deloraine Municipal Council; Mr Robert Dixon; Mrs Joan Dixon; Ian Downie; Mr Barry Dudman; Mr G.W. Dyson; Mr Henry Richard Edgell; the Department of the Environment; the Federation of Tasmania Bushwalking Clubs; the Forest Industries Association of Tasmania; the Forestry Commission; Mr Greg French; the Freshwater Anglers Association; the Fly-Fishers Club; Mr Jason Garrett -

Dr BATES - Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Standing order 143 states: