



Hon. Geoff Squibb MLC

Legislative Council

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Electorate: Mersey

PRISONERS (REMOVAL OF CIVIL DISABILITIES) BILL 1990

Second Reading

Mr SQUIBB (Mersey) - Mr President, I guess I have surprised quite a few, having sat through the debate this afternoon and now rising on a subject I have very little knowledge of. In fact, I have not visited a prison either as a visitor or as a client, so my comments are going to be quite brief on this. But I would like to take this opportunity of thanking you, Sir, for your warm welcome to this place and also to thank your staff and to thank the Leader and his staff and all honourable members for the welcome and the friendship they have extended in the short time that I have been here.

I also understand that on my first occasion I am extended certain courtesies which may never be available to me again, and so I thank members in anticipation of that.

I am rising, I suppose, also to give myself the opportunity to participate more freely in the Committee stages of the bill we were discussing earlier on.

Mr President, could I make a brief reference to my predecessor. I know that on the occasion of his last evening in this Chamber everybody spoke in glowing terms but I would like to add to that. I noticed that on many occasions the former honourable member for Mersey often referred to himself as a simple country boy. But I noticed that on that final night many speakers referred to him as the 'father of the House' and 'a master tactician'. But throughout his eighteen years I have noticed in Hansard and press reports that one thing came through fairly consistently, and that was his degree of commonsense. I would hope that at the end of my stay here I would be able to say that I have carried on that role with a similar amount of commonsense.

Harry Braid, of course, was a member from 1972 to 1990 and served as President during 1983 and 1984. Throughout those eighteen years he was a champion of the north west and I am sure that had he been here this afternoon he would have spent quite a bit of time on his feet, and I am sure he would have voted the same way that I did.

He was quoted on many occasions as saying, 'Do not let the north west become the Cinderella of the State' and I would like to continue, even at the risk of being called parochial, with that particular theme.

He was, of course, a great supporter of development for this State and at the same time he was a friend of the elderly, the disabled and the disadvantaged. I guess he was also known affectionately as 'Hydro Harry' and that goes back to his support of hydro

development in his time as the chairman of the select committee which recommended the Franklin-Lower Gordon Scheme.

He was a farmer's friend; he had a very good basic knowledge of farming and of agriculture and was a great supporter of farmers and the rural industry. In the electorate of Mersey, of course, we have two very prominent agricultural shows and he has been and continues to be a very strong supporter of both of those. I guess it is through those avenues and through the rural youth organisation that I first met Harry Braid.

During the last generation of Bass Strait shipping he was a strong supporter of the replacement of the Empress of Australia with a service which operated out of Devonport and I know that some eight years later, had he been here at this stage, he would too, because right up until he retired from this place he was a strong supporter and was urging a prompt and positive response on the question of the replacement for the Abel Tasman.

Like my colleague, the honourable member for Meander, he was also a very strong supporter of the Wesley Vale project, and I think that support goes further than just the Wesley Vale project. I am quite sure that any project of that type in this State that would provide downstream processing would have also gained his support.

He was a man of vision. Quite some time ago he was suggesting that investigations should be carried out regarding the amalgamation of some of the local government areas on the north-west coast and I suppose in doing that he was referring to some of those areas within the electorate which both the honourable member for Meander and I now represent.

He was a great supporter of, and was instrumental in, having the electoral boundaries which divided Devonport corrected, and I think the people of Devonport will see that come to their advantage in the years ahead.

Outside of this place, of course, he had a great love of bowls and I know that several honourable members here were converted to instant champions as a result of his tuition.

Harry Braid served his country - I look at nobody in particular - the Ulverstone community, the Ulverstone Council, the electorate of Mersey and this Chamber with distinction. He and Maisie were regular and constant attenders at numerous functions throughout the electorate and I would certainly like to wish them both a long and happy retirement.

Mr President, I am honoured to be the eleventh member for Mersey. The seat of Mersey was established in 1871 with William Hawkes as the first member and its membership has alternated between the communities of Devonport and Ulverstone over those years. I believe the electors have been fortunate to have the representation they have in the past. In fact, my two immediate predecessors both aspired to the position which you now hold - and let me hasten to offer my full support for you in that position.

Prior to Mr Braid, the seat of Mersey was held from 1954 to 1972 by Hector McFie who is the other honourable member who served in that position and, like Harry Braid, Hector McFie served for three terms or eighteen years and, whilst I was quick to move

on the previous one, Sir, I make no bones of the fact that I hop to complete the hat trick there and serve at least eighteen years for Mersey.

Like several of our present-day honourable members, Mr President, the late Hector McFie was also known to speak to every bill. Prior to Hector McFie this seat was held by M.G. Lakin but, unlike the members I have just referred to, his term was eighteen weeks or thereabouts rather than eighteen years. Of course, prior to that Alexander Elliot Davidson Lillico represented the electorate for 30 years from 1924 to 1954 and, like Harry Braid and myself and of course many other honourable members in this Chamber, he came from a background of local government. Because of that background I think you will find my contributions to the debates here, Mr President, particularly in the early stages, will be quite brief. We have standing orders which limit how long a speaker can speak and I have assured my colleagues in local government that I will be endeavouring to stick to those in this place rather than trying to convert them to the unlimited times.

Elliot Lillico served over many years - 8 years as warden of Kentish, 30 years as a member of this Chamber and 15 years in the Senate - but he is probably best remembered for his statement - and it has often been quoted: 'It is not what the bill says, but what the bill will do, that is important.'

Around the turn of the century two great names come to mind and it is important, particularly to the people of Devonport at this particular time, that I refer to those two names because synonymous with early Devonport - because this year is Devonport's centenary year - are the names of John Hair McCall and John Henry. These names have been mentioned quite a lot at various centenary celebrations during this year. Mr President, they are some of the people who have served the seat of Mersey before I have.

I come to this Chamber at a time when there is a great deal of concern about a great many issues by a great many people in the electorate of Mersey. I think I could also say that that some concern spreads to at least some of the neighbouring electorates and, contrary to what some sections of the media may be saying and what some politicians may be saying, that concern is not being whipped up, certainly to my knowledge anyhow, by politicians but it is a real concern coming from the grassroots. I do not intend to elaborate tonight on those concerns because I think the opportunity will be available to me in the coming months to do that. I would just like to mention in passing what some of those concerns are and some that were highlighted during my election campaign in May.

I guess members have heard from my colleague, the member for Meander, that the people from our area are concerned about hospital services. They are concerned about the cutback in ambulance services. They are concerned about the high unemployment levels and it is safe to note that many small businesses in our area have already gone to the wall and that same trend unfortunately now seems to be moving into some of the larger private sector, locally operated enterprises - and that is sad. There is also of course concern about the proposed school bus fares and cuts to education. Since that particular election campaign that I referred to concerns are being expressed about the changes in TAFE, the further delays in an announcement on the Abel Tasman, further closure of government services in Devonport and Ulverstone, concern about the

possible closure of the Devonport police station and reduced police manning levels in Ulverstone and of course a great deal of concern about redundancies.

Mr President, I know there is a need for financial rationalisation at this time. This is being imposed on us for a number of reasons, not the least of course being that there has been a cutback in Federal funding. But the bottom line is that in this coming year, just as in the past year and in the previous year, the State Government has the same amount of money at its disposal as it has had in those previous years. It is all a matter of priorities and it is of concern to people in my electorate that an amount of some \$4 million was spent as compensation for Huon Forest Products - \$4 million spent to stop jobs, \$4 million that could have been better spent in these tight economic times that are often referred to, \$4 million that could have been spent on education, \$4 million that could have been spent on health care or \$4 million that could have been spent to subsidise and provide school bus services.

There are also a number of other areas, without going into a great deal of research; the numbers in the House of Assembly have not changed since the election last year but a considerable amount of money has been spent on providing additional office accommodation, office equipment and staff. Again this is money which has been spent on what is seen as a priority over some of those basic services to which I referred earlier.

We also have the situation where the Department of Construction is planning to spend or has spent \$4 million on new plant and equipment, and this is plant and equipment which is going to be used to compete with the private sector in tendering for jobs - and when I say compete, I do not really mean compete because they do not compete on level playing fields.

Since then it has been identified that some \$4 million has been overspent in the budget in this past year in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. It must be of some concern as to where that has been spent. I know that a number of new units have been created which of course involves the employment of additional people and these are funds which have also been given priority over some of those basic services I referred to earlier. And when we have a government which consists of both the ALP and the Greens that went to the electorate last year, both indicating that education would be a priority, I must now question whether in fact education is being treated as a priority.

Mr President, I see my role here as being quite varied but I would like to recall the advice given by the late Hector McFie to Harry Braid when he assumed this role, and that was: 'You have your seat as a licence to represent the people of your electorate and the people of Tasmania while you hold it. Make sure you pass it on as good as you gained it. Make sure you pass it on unblemished'. It is certainly my aim to try to continue that tradition that has been firmly established by previous members for Mersey.

Mr President, I see my role as basically to support the Government of the day but I qualify that a little in that the Government of the day will have my support, provided it abides by those policies it went to the electorate with on the last occasion and I also reserve the right to vote contrary to government when it is the wish of the electorate that I represent.

Some people may see that as being parochial and I am prepared to wear that. I think there is a safeguard built into the system because for this House to oppose or amend anything that the Government is proposing requires on most occasions the vote of ten members and for that to occur there must be fairly widespread concern across a fair amount of the State.

Mr President, speaking to the particular bill which is before the House at the moment, I must say that generally speaking I am supporting the bill. Like many honourable members who have spoken before me, I do have concern about clause 4. Like several honourable members who have spoken previously, I am concerned that here we are proposing to give a particular privilege to those who have committed offences against society and, bearing in mind that they are for terms of two years or more, they are fairly significant offences. But at the same time in a bill that we will be dealing with at a later stage we are proposing to take away from those corporations and companies that are making a positive contribution that same right.

As I said earlier, I have not visited a prison previously in any capacity so I am speaking without a great deal of experience. But it would seem to me that, having spent two years or more in those particular establishments, a person would be quite removed from what is actually happening out in the real world. I should imagine that their access to news and to media reports and to general feedback from the community would be rather limited and I think that would be particularly the case with those who normally live in places far removed from where the actual prison is located. So I would question their ability to make a judgment in those cases. But basically, Mr President, I support the bill but I do have reservations about clause 4.

Members - Hear, hear.