

Inaugural Speech – Paul Lennon MP



Paul Lennon MP

House of Assembly

Date: 31 October 1990

Electorate: Franklin

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (PLANNING FEES) BILL 1990

Mr SPEAKER - The honourable member for Franklin, Mr Lennon, making his inaugural speech.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr LENNON (Franklin) - Thank you, Mr Speaker.

At the outset I would like to pay tribute to the retiring member for Franklin, Mr Ken Wriedt. Ken Wriedt served the people of Tasmania across four decades, from the sixties through to the nineties. I am sure all members would agree with me that over that time he served Tasmania with distinction, put the people first and himself second. I wish Mr Wriedt and his wife well in their future pursuits and in particular I wish him a speedy recovery to good health.

Government members - Hear, hear.

Mr LENNON - No government would willingly undertake the measures proposed in this year's Budget. They are necessary to correct the ballast on the economic ship, otherwise ours is the fate of the Titanic. The state of our public sector finances has been succinctly documented and explained by the Premier many times. I do not propose to dwell on this matter except to note that I believe he has gained widespread public understanding on the problems and acceptance that drastic measures are necessary.

The body of my contribution will be to identify some of the major imperatives and use them to build a solid platform for the future, for I fear that if we do not embark upon a major restructure of our economy Tasmania will never recover.

The important thing is not to stop here but to develop a plan, a strategy for managing change through the establishment of a series of interlocked processes. What then are the imperatives from which we can devise the ideas for our future directions? Firstly, our capacity to change is strictly limited and requires community commitment. Some solutions, which on the face of it are seemingly obvious, produce inescapable problems in their wake. Attempts to manipulate change can run headlong into longheld traditions. This is particularly so here, with our individualistic traditions, which delight in ridiculing and decapitating the so-called 'tall poppies' -

Mr BRAID - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not like to have to raise a point of order on a member's maiden speech, but we are dealing with a local government amendment bill. Could the member get round to talking about the planning bill,

otherwise he is creating a precedent that in a second reading debate members can range far and wide. On this bill we can deal with anything regarding amendments to the Local Government Act. Unless the member comes back to that, I think he may be out of order.

I do not like raising this point of order but I am concerned at the precedents we are going to create as a result of this. I am not being vindictive in raising the point of order but I seek some clarification because somewhere along the line, Mr Speaker, you have to rule and this will be a precedent. You may be able to give me some guidance, Mr Speaker.

Mr HOLGATE - I would like to speak to the point of order, Mr Speaker. We also questioned the previous speaker's relevance to this particular bill. However all these matters are taxation bills. I have been in this place not quite as long as the member for Lyons, Mr Braid, but almost as long -

Mr Hodgman - I think we have just had an affront to the Speaker's ruling. He didn't say my contribution was irrelevant; to the contrary, he said it was relevant and dismissed the point of order. I think you owe him an apology and me an apology.

Mr HOLGATE - I am not going to apologise to anyone. I think the opposition members owe an apology to the member who is making his maiden speech, to be quite honest.

This is the first time I have known anyone take a point of order on a maiden speech. Quite obviously the member has been here only a short time; he has to speak to a particular taxation bill - because we will be here for at least another two weeks on taxation measures - and is trying to fit in his speech. I think the member is entitled to some latitude; he will obviously come back to some relevance on this bill. Otherwise if you uphold the point of order, Mr Speaker, as it has been put, this member will not have the opportunity to make his maiden speech except on the adjournment. I have never known any House being so narrow-minded as to say a member should be forced to make a maiden speech on the adjournment - that is the only other way he can do it - and obviously the member wants to participate in the debates on these very important bills.

The only opportunity he has is on this particular - or on some other - budget bill. He was actually going to make it on the previous one but we postponed that. One assumes, Sir, that he was going to canvass his introductory remarks, which he is obliged to do out of courtesy. One could even say that standing up and making a reference to the former minister, Mr Wriedt, who has just retired, was completely irrelevant as far as this bill is concerned. Of course it is, we know that, but there are certain forms and he wanted to do it to acknowledge his predecessor.

If you uphold the point of order, Sir, you are effectively shutting out this member from the debates on all the budget bills and he has not been allowed to continue his speech long enough for you to know what relevance it has to this particular bill. I have been listening here for the past fifteen hours to debate on a previous bill and I could say there were many parts of that debate that had no relevance to that bill. But I

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did not stand up - nor did anyone on this side - to try to take a point of order, because we wanted a free and far-reaching debate on all these important issues.

Sir, I say that you should reject the point of order. The member is entirely in order. He wishes to make his maiden speech; he is taking the opportunity to do that as early as possible, which he is entitled to do, because he wants to participate in debate on other budget bills. Sir, I think that you should rule that the member is entirely in order.

Mr RUNDLE - Just briefly on the point of order, Mr Speaker. I certainly do not want to be churlish about this matter and I very much respect the right of the member for Franklin, Mr Lennon, to speak. I just make the point that I think we are all conscious of the rights of new members to make a maiden speech. However there are rights that override individuals, and they are the Parliament itself and this House, and I think that is the point my colleague from Lyons who has been here a long time was making.

I simply say that I welcome the member's speech. However if he should choose to make his speech during debate on a particular bill, one of the penalties that he would then have to pay for making that decision is to speak to the bill. That may be a little more restrictive than he would have liked but it is a penalty that he chooses of his own volition by choosing this particular moment when we are talking about a local government bill, and I believe that is the dilemma he has.

I do not think any new member coming into the House would necessarily expect the parliamentary rules to be completely changed - or indeed broken - because of that individual. I think we would all agree that the parliamentary process is bigger than any individual member of it.

Mr Patmore - What a low act.

Mr Holgate - Yes, it is the best I've ever heard.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. In ruling on the point of order, I think it is timely that the honourable member for Lyons reminds the House that there are fairly strict rules governing debate on various bills and it should be restricted to the subject that is before the House. I think we should all keep that in mind. From time to time honourable members do stray, and the Chair tries to allow a degree of latitude. However I believe that on this occasion the Chair should allow the member to continue if for no other reason than that honourable members would recall that some weeks ago I allowed the honourable Leader of the Opposition to make an address to the House on the third reading of a bill which was totally contrary to the Standing Orders. I brought that to the notice of the House at the time but I believed that it was of such moment that the Leader of the Opposition ought to have been able to continue his address at that time. Using the same principle I rule that the honourable member continues his speech.

Mr Braid - That's fair enough.

Government members - Hear, hear.

Mr LENNON - Thank you, Mr Speaker.

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As I was saying this is particularly so here with our individualistic traditions which delight in ridiculing and decapitating the so-called 'tall poppies' with the bright ideas. Consequently change must have a ripple-like effect and be blended into our established culture. Getting to first base, however, does require the courage - where the circumstances demand - to introduce what at first seem oppressive policies and measures foreign to our traditions. In a sense, conflict is an essential ingredient of change.

In the end though our capacity is limited to our limited imagination, finite resources, natural resistance to change and the competing demands that sections of our population place upon us. Beginning the process of change requires, therefore, all of us to focus on the future through a wide-angled lens, to develop a broad vision in other words.

The second imperative: increasingly our domestic policies will become more subject to international imperatives. One of the important factors that has emerged is that our capacity to control events here depends increasingly on what is occurring internationally. I cite as examples the floating of the Australian dollar, international commodity prices and of course the events currently occurring in Iraq.

The third imperative: our youth are particularly vulnerable and are the breeding ground of unrest. It would be easy to say that we should tackle the causes of youth unemployment and ignore the symptoms that arise from it, such as violence, drug abuse, boredom and so on, but the age of technology has created one of the great ironies in that it has actually reduced the number of available jobs. What then are we to do: improve skills training; give special assistance with trade apprenticeships; promise exemption from industrial action; abolish penalty rates and so on.

Whatever we do we must always remember that we cannot just shuffle our youth around to meet the ongoing imperatives of our industrial society. Self-respect must never be put up for sale. Our human resource is very special, therefore we must manage change in a way that provides hope for the future.

We cannot allow our society to develop in a way that leaves large numbers of people with no prospect of a job and therefore no opportunity of self-fulfilment. We must either provide jobs or change the expectations of society and our attitudes towards leisure and employment. The current despair of our youth is, I believe, our most pressing problem. It must be a major focus for government. Their despair is no better explained than by the following verse:

I need a job
I need a chance
The time has come when I've begun to see
If there's a God, he doesn't like me
How can I try to make a start
When everything around me just falls apart
Oh it .
It is all news about the private sector
With all the millions from the tax collector
All I want to do is earn my cup of tea

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I need a job, I'm on the alert
It doesn't matter if I'm shovelling dirt
I need a chance
Why can't you see
That all these lousy things will stop happening to me'

The fourth imperative: technology is a powerful dynamic of change. We ignore it at our peril but we must recognise it brings as many problems as it solves. There can be no doubt that technology opens new opportunities but what about those thrown out of work - are they suitably retrained; are the alternative jobs in the right place? Whether we like it or not the age of technology is upon us. The challenge for us is to influence its impact. Because of the uncertainty this new age brings, most people would prefer not to change. Therefore we must provide the impetus to stimulate the complacent into new activities, where appropriate. Small achievements are likely to secure more in the long run than ill-thought-out bold leaps. The aggregation of many individual initiatives remains our best hope for the future. Our task is to foster the social and economic conditions which facilitate and encourage such initiative.

The fifth imperative: major reform must occur to streamline governmental and bureaucratic inefficiency. All of us, I venture to say, have at some time expressed dismay at the inefficiency of governmental arrangements in Australia. A hallmark of our system of Federal government is institutional inefficiency. Consider if you will the plight of Albury-Wodonga, responding in its formative stages to five governments. Furthermore, the division of powers between the Federal Government and the States all too often results in buck-passing. Far from encouraging new enterprise and new initiative, government regulation and bureaucracy are often seen as the enemies of efficiency and the effective management of change.

The sixth imperative: managing change requires an ability to react positively and imaginatively. We are constantly confronted with conflicting and puzzling data. Technological change is the way of the future but it must be recognised that it often requires the facilitator of change to reconcile what appears on the surface irreconcilable. In the course of managing change numerous ironies and quandaries will arise. Each of these will require a willingness and a capacity to trial new methods and processes.

These are my major imperatives; no doubt others will arise. How then are we to proceed from here?

Government's role is to act as the facilitator; to draw together the major players. Managing change effectively requires an integration of the range of initiatives necessary. I propose that Tasmania must develop a coherent plan through a wide-ranging process of consultation, overseen and coordinated by government. The plan needs to incorporate strategies which provide clearly defined future directions for Tasmania's social, economic and industrial development.

The common characteristic in successful approaches is that both overall and specific policy making is underpinned by formal and informal cooperation between government, unions, business and the community generally. This cooperation must be based upon a set of clearly defined common objectives. Strategies that are pursued in

an autocratic way too often are socially disruptive and inefficient. Furthermore, such approaches are more likely to result in disastrous unemployment levels and a high degree of social and regional inequality. That is not to say that a policy framework underpinned by a large degree of consensus does not bring problems. But where problems arise because of the tripartite framework the inbuilt degree of commitment to success acts as a circuit breaker.

Establishing a cooperative model from which our future directions will come will not be easy. It will require a number of elements: a stable economic environment; policies to support efficient industry; measures to promote productive investment; a comprehensive social justice strategy; a sound and consistently applied environment protection strategy; and policies to encourage industry restructuring guided by specific and targeted trade and industry policies.

What are the advantages of a tripartite consultative approach? Firstly, the likelihood of the effects of various policy decisions being anticipated before implementation is significantly enhanced; secondly, a broadly-based bond of commitment and ownership ensures a greater chance of success; thirdly, the narrow regional focus - for so long the Achilles heel of Tasmania - is replaced by a structured statewide process; and fourthly, structural change is achieved via a commonly agreed and understood equitable distribution of the burden of adjustment.

How then should we go about it? First and foremost we must collectively develop our economic and social mission statement which would clearly set out our objectives through a process of negotiation which enables substantial support from all parties. I believe the statement will need to include our aims concerning employment, living standards, economic growth and the equitable distribution of wealth, among other things.

The next step is to establish a series of consultative councils similar to the Forests and Forest Industry Council, each with clearly-defined terms of reference and stated objectives consistent with our overall mission statement. The councils should have responsibility for providing recommendations to government. On the question of industry development, the councils would deal with three central issues: the further development of our natural resources, secondary and tertiary industries sectors; infrastructure support; and the development of markets for our products.

I turn briefly to each of these.

There can be no doubt that Tasmania has abundant natural resources but the development of these here in Tasmania - whether they be agricultural, mineral, forestry or fishing - has not as yet reached their potential. In particular I refer here to the downstream processing potential that exists. Equally, there remains considerable potential for conflict over environmental matters in terms of both the resource management and the product development for each of these areas.

The second issue is infrastructure support, and within this area I would propose that a range of micro-economic reforms would be dealt with. As a State we need to pay particular attention to skills development procedures, transport costs, and government and bureaucratic regulations, among a range of other things.

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The third area of attention relates to the development of markets for our products. With a small population we cannot hope to create sufficient demand locally such that we could maintain a comparatively competitive industry sector. Accordingly an examination of the forecast demand for a range of products that we could produce competitively is essential.

The second major focus of the 'future directions' plan for Tasmania is our social support framework. This area includes - but is not exclusive of - issues such as welfare, housing, education and health. I would propose that consultative councils be created to develop cohesive strategies in these areas in the same way I have suggested for industry development. The task then is to interlock the social and industrial strategies thus ensuring that our overall focus is not only about the creation of wealth but, importantly, about its equitable distribution as well.

I would like to conclude by reminding members of my opening remarks. For Tasmania to manage effectively the change that is required we must act cooperatively and in a cohesive manner. We must understand the imperatives and develop effective strategies for our future directions. We must encourage innovative and imaginative ideas and we must act positively. We must recognise that our youth are particularly vulnerable and therefore pay special attention to their needs. But the successful development and implementation of a future directions plan for Tasmania requires above all a unified approach. The pursuit of parochialism and sectional interests cannot be allowed to be the dominant imperative.

During his welcoming address to the participants at the Sixth Duke of Edinburgh Study Conference held in Australia and India in 1986, Sir Zelman Cowen had the following to say:

'I doubt that anyone would be able to label our age although it might be called the age of frustrated expectations, the age of protest against almost anything, the age of unlimited possibilities and disappointing results. It is an age that can put men on the moon, yet create impossible traffic tangles in every metropolitan centre. It is an age of unbelievable wealth and widespread poverty. It is an age of sensitivity to human dignity and human progress, yet one in which there is relatively little of either despite the available resources. It is finally an age where the hopes, the expectations and the promises of humanity have been more rhetorical than real. There is a wide gulf between the blueprint and the reality, the word and the deed.'

I urge that we collectively work positively to bridge the gulf between the blueprint and the reality, and the word and the deed. Pigeonholed reports and empty rhetoric must be banished to the annals of history. Through this Budget this Government has taken the first step forward in the process of putting in place the right settings for the effective management of Tasmania's future. I commend the Premier and his Cabinet. History too, I believe, will judge his foresight and courageous decisions in good light.

Government members - Hear, hear.