




Speech By
Bart Mellish

MEMBER FOR ASPLEY

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr MELLISH** (Aspley—ALP) (4.14 pm): It is a tremendous honour to address the House today as the representative for the seat of Aspley. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this parliament meets. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and future. I take this opportunity to congratulate my fellow new MPs, some of whom I knew pre politics and many of whom I have briefly come to know since the election. I also congratulate re-elected MPs and those who have been appointed or elected to positions such as yours, Mr Speaker. I congratulate the Premier on her strong and smart leadership of the state throughout the last term and indeed the election campaign. Without her leadership I would surely not be standing here today and we would not be in a majority Labor government.

It is very much a great privilege to be able to represent my community of Aspley. I intend to advocate for them as hard as I can, making a difference in their lives through what I can do both in the community and here in parliament. Many people say that running a campaign to be an MP and being an MP are two vastly different things. In many ways I tend to disagree. There are so many aspects from our campaign that I want to carry over into this position such as a commitment to hard work, getting some great local projects across the line and an undertaking to continually listen to the community. I will do rather than say. I will try not to get bogged down in being reactive or in procedure and process but keep a focus on what is best for my community. I will make sure I am engaging with locals not just during campaigns but all the time.

The Palaszczuk government has a great agenda of health, education, jobs and transport election commitments to deliver on across the state and locally in Aspley. I intend to help make them happen in any way I can. I am proud that we ran a local campaign based around real issues in Aspley, and we managed to get some great transport, education and sporting commitments across the line. I am very keen to ensure they happen.

Aspley consists of the suburbs of Geebung, Zillmere, Carseldine, McDowall, Chermside West, Bridgeman Downs, Bald Hills, Aspley itself and a very small part of Albany Creek. Since I put my hand up to run and since being elected I have been blown away by the number of people in the electorate I have come across who, through their involvement in local organisations or on their own, are working selflessly to make their community a better place to live. These people do not want any grand accolades; they are not paid and, more often than not, they are fiercely bipartisan. I am immensely thankful to have the opportunity to be able to work with these people throughout this term and get some great local wins across the suburbs of the Aspley electorate.

Many of these suburbs are very different from one another, but most are linked through the thoroughfares of Gympie Road and the north coast railway line. There are different communities in Aspley, but they all have many things in common. They all want a good education for their children and better opportunities for those who follow them. They all want good health outcomes so that they can

trust the public health system when they need to use it. They want to be able to commute to work and home again in as little time as possible to spend more time with their friends and loved ones. It is that last point which is so important to people in Aspley and so important to me.

There is no doubt that there is a longstanding, historical, strong commitment of Labor governments to major transport infrastructure in Queensland. With my private, departmental and political background in the transport industry, I will fight hard to make sure my area always gets its fair share. Public transport in particular has the possibility for massive step changes in the way people get around and in where they choose to live. New road infrastructure is always important to keep up with growth, but it is only through public transport investment that we can get ahead of demand. Light rail on the Gold Coast, Springfield rail, Redcliffe rail and the entire Brisbane busway network are recent examples of great state Labor investments in transport infrastructure. Cross River Rail and the European Train Control System are the next cabs off the rank. They are both projects which will benefit the Aspley electorate enormously. Enough about trains, and a bit about myself.

A lot of people ask me where the name 'Mellish' comes from. There is either the short answer or the slightly longer answer. The short answer says that the name originates from somewhere south of London, but the long answer goes some way to describing the background of my immediate family and why I believe what I believe.

My paternal grandfather, Fred Mellish, came to Australia as a young foster-child from the UK, very much starting from nothing. He battled his way through a variety of jobs and when World War II came to the Pacific, he joined the Army in his mid-30s. Like many who joined at the time, this did not go well for him. Upon being deployed to Singapore he was immediately captured and spent the next three years in the notorious hellhole of Changi Prison and building the Burma Railway.

Unlike so many of his fellow Australians at Changi, he was very fortunate to survive the war and return to Australia in 1945. Two more sons followed, including my father, before Fred's death in a rail accident in 1958, whereupon my grandmother, Hazel, was left to raise her three sons on her own. In what is in hindsight a very sad coincidence, the local policeman at Redbank who had to deliver the news to my grandmother was actually future Labor leader Bill Hayden. It was only through Fred and Hazel's perseverance through very different adversities that I am fortunate enough to be here today.

On the other side of my family, my mother's upbringing was certainly no silver spoon affair either: growing up with five other siblings, the daughter of a train driver in a modest three-bedroom house in Ipswich. This thread of perseverance and hard work was instilled in my parents through theirs and in me through my parents. My parents have always worked hard to help their community: my mother in helping people get jobs and my father at TAFE helping people build their skills so they can get better jobs.

I think the best thing I have inherited from my father apart from my height is probably his highly tuned radar for bullcrap, if I can use that term, Mr Speaker. From my mother I would like to think I have inherited a strong sense of social justice and helping those less fortunate than yourself as well as a dose of diplomacy to balance out my father's frankness, for lack of a better term. I thank my parents for being a great example of post-war Australians who wanted their children to have it better than they themselves had it growing up.

I still remember when my father graduated from university well into his adult life. He was the first generation of our family to do so. Our parents made sure that we did not take anything for granted. Growing up in Toowoomba my brothers and I were driven to secure academic scholarships to high school, and our parents made sure we had the grades to attend our university, USQ, over the back fence. I enjoyed USQ so much that I went back twice.

Despite much whingeing and occasional rebellions throughout our formative years, we were all very grateful to have parents who saw the value in pushing ourselves academically; however, it has not all been smooth sailing. I still recall moving to Brisbane from Toowoomba in my early twenties. I had no car, no job, one bag of clothes, less than \$100 to my name and only one week's accommodation lined up. My family and friends probably thought I would last a couple of months in Brissie at best, but thankfully I am still here. I may move back to Toowoomba one day many, many years from now, but I am certainly not done yet.

I am very thankful for the opportunities I have been given in politics and the transport and environment sectors, both public and private—here, interstate and overseas—but I have had to work hard every step of the way for those opportunities. There are many people who have shown faith in me over my professional career, particularly within the Labor Party. I will come back to that a bit later. That is a little bit of my background and why I believe I have it in me to be a tireless advocate for the people of Aspley.

While I hold the view that politics is primarily about people, it is also about tangible policy issues at the end of the day. I have always been interested in politics, not as a means to its own end but as a way of implementing good policy which actually helps people. An essential part of implementing good policy is being able to communicate. Many people in the media and politics have commented in recent times about the ever-shortening political attention span of the public, political parties and media coverage in general. This is being driven by a range of factors including, obviously, technology. Political discourse has had to evolve from the printing press to radio to television and now to social media.

In 1985, well before his time, Neil Postman wrote about the corrosive effects of electronic media on a democratic society. Postman said—

... television is the paradigm for our conception of public information. As the printing press did in an earlier time, television has achieved the power to define the form in which news must come, and it has also defined how we shall respond to it.

In other words, the medium in which we consume political news defines what type of political news is covered. On the surface this conclusion does not bode well for nuanced policy discussion in the era of Facebook and Twitter; however, as parliamentarians we must all strive to still debate the big issues and not just reduce every political argument to its shortest, most readily digestible form. I genuinely believe there is still a place for serious public discussion of big issues at a state level because there has to be, so working out ways to achieve that in the current media landscape will be one of my goals in this place. For me that means two things: talking directly to people as often as I can and making sure that what I talk about matters. On this issue Paul Keating had it right when he recently said—

... when those big ideas are not in evidence and the momentum isn't there, the flux never materialises. Then the static takes over and the static is now writ large by social media and the vacuous news cycle.

He continues—

I still believe that the power of the big idea or the power of a guiding light will always take precedence over the static of the twittersphere or anything like it. It's more the pity that enough people in public life don't believe that.

Having used that quote about big ideas in my maiden speech, and because I believe that politics is actually about big ideas, I think it is important that I briefly talk about what I think will be one of the biggest issues in public policy that governments will face over the next 10 to 20 years, and that is the potentially devastating impact on the workforce of rapid advancements in technology if left unchecked. Due to the increasing speed of telecommunications, increases in computing ability and the growth of computer intelligence, we are currently in the midst of a substantial shift in the way society communicates with itself and how work is organised. Technology is impacting not only the types of jobs we have but on what the very nature of having a job means. I see one of the greatest risks to a fair society from this technological revolution coming from the so-called 'gig economy', or basically employment on demand.

This is a world where a job is created and ended with the click of a button on a smartphone. Examples of platforms for this work run the full gamut of services from Airbnb to Etsy to Deliveroo and tech giants such as Amazon. At its best, this model provides convenience, cheaper products and friendlier service, but at its worst it is effectively circumventing generations of hard-won employment rights such as penalty rates, workplace health and safety, superannuation and protection against unfair dismissal. If left to its own devices, massive shifts in how work is allocated and apportioned will result in further wealth concentration and lessening of opportunity—a 'cheery wave from stranded youngsters', as it has been described.

As Atlassian founder Mike Cannon-Brookes recently said to a federal Senate inquiry—

Software is eating every industry in the world. Tech disruption is a very real thing. It's happening all around us. It's happening faster than you think. And that's hard for governments.

That is the reality. If governments wait for someone else to take the running on this issue, it will be too late.

The International Monetary Fund—hardly a pack of rabid socialists—recently noted that the rise of the gig economy has the potential to challenge the very structure of social safety nets which have underpinned Western economies since World War II. There is no doubt it will be a real challenge for all parliaments as to how we harness this technological revolution to make the lives of everyday Australians better, not worse.

Broadly speaking, while we should always seek to create reforms that benefit the great majority of people through greater competition of services and a higher quality and range of goods, we must also consider how to manage the very real impact of these changes on the workers of the gig economy. My fear is that a failure to acknowledge and anticipate these technological changes will further entrench

inequality, leading to a more divided society, and a highly unequal society leads to a fractured society for everyone. To steal a quote from an excellent recent publication by federal member of parliament Jim Chalmers and former CEO of NBN Co Mike Quigley—

Large numbers of people being left behind for an extended period is not conducive to social stability.

How do we respond to this change? We could do worse than looking into the history of our nation. When the French scholar and later Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Albert Metin visited Australia at the dawn of the 20th century he discovered a true oddity to his European eyes. Australia had established labour legislation founded on conciliation, arbitration, workers' protections and a minimum wage but without the baggage of radical ideology. He dubbed our land a 'workers' paradise' formed through 'socialism with no doctrine'.

We are all fortunate to be reminded that in Australia our world-leading social and economic reforms were built on the back of strong argument, persuasion and consensus. I do not need to go through the early history of workplace relations in Australia that led to labour leaders organising into a political movement and taking the fight for reform into the parliamentary realm, but it is in this vein of practical, common-sense responses to the changing nature of work that I believe we must face the current wave of technological changes sweeping across our society, because the alternative to this discussion being led by parliaments is that a void will be filled by major multinationals and consumers themselves in a race to the bottom.

Just as Australian parliaments of the 1800s and early 1900s adapted and changed as the understanding of work and industrial relations changed, so too do we need to adapt and change as the nature of work changes yet again. The primary beneficiaries of these waves of technological change must be Queensland workers and Queensland business owners, not tech billionaires from California. It is not just workers who have much to lose. Queensland's small, medium and large businesses have the potential to be washed away by large overseas operators who may or may not be playing by the same rules.

In Australia we have much to be proud of in our workplace conditions. We do not have the sheer numbers of working poor that America has, for example, where the lack of a decent minimum wage means that whole swathes of workers still need handouts to get by, but we cannot rest on our laurels. Unions clearly have a stake in this, and it is very pleasing to see many of them driving public discussion around on-demand employment in everything from trade services to warehousing to delivery services. To quote a recent report from the Australian Council of Trade Unions—

We are seeing a generation of workers growing up without access to sick leave, annual leave, minimum rates of pay, OHS protections and workers' compensation.

I do not proclaim to offer all the answers today, but these are important questions that this parliament can help answer. We cannot just ignore people being left behind by ever-increasing technology and pull the ladder up after ourselves. We cannot sit back and hope that the tech billionaires and start-ups from San Francisco driving these changes will have our community's best interests at heart. We as elected officials owe it to our constituents to make sure technological changes work for our communities, not against them.

There are obviously many other policy challenges facing Queensland, and I am incredibly proud to be part of a Labor government that will tackle many of them this term. The failure of the federal government to deal with climate change means, increasingly, states are having to play a greater role going forward. Queensland can obviously play a big role in this, as it has done before.

Sensible land clearing policy under previous state Labor governments was substantially responsible for Australia meeting its emissions reduction targets by 2020 under the Kyoto Protocol. I will have much more to say about this at the appropriate time but, both as a biologist and someone who has worked in resource management in regional and rural Queensland, I take a keen interest in this.

In a similar vein to the points I was making regarding the regulation of technology, it is very pleasing to see the Premier take a strong lead on cyberbullying, an issue that cannot be ignored. On this and on so many other issues, as technology changes and adapts, government policy often needs to change and adapt.

I take this opportunity to thank a range of people without whose help I surely would not be the member for Aspley today. My wife, Vivienne, I cannot thank enough. Vivienne has always supported me in everything I do, especially over the last year. She is probably the nicest, most talented and hardest working person I know, but I am biased! She has very much made me a better person since I met her. I thanked my parents earlier; my mother is here today. I also thank my brothers, Daniel and Joel, as well as my extended family who helped on the campaign.

Labor Party branch members in Geebung and Aspley were an incredible help, making sure we ran a tight ship and got our message out there to as many people as possible. My campaign team were a hastily assembled pack of legends, particularly Rosemary, Louen, Stella, Daniel, Dearne, Jon, Anika and Finn. My field organiser, Jack, and of course, Dean, were out there almost every day of the campaign with me rain, hail or shine. I also thank Georgia from my office. Evan Moorhead and Jon Persley from the party office ran a fantastic state campaign. Julie-Ann Campbell and Sarah Mawhinney have big shoes to fill, but I know both of them are well and truly up to the task. I thank Jon and also Josh Millroy, who as my organiser was always there to hear out my complaining and, importantly, filter out my bolder ideas.

It is also worth thanking those who helped my campaign with external advice, both good and bad, along the way, including Matt, Lachlan, Mark, Elliot, Izzy and Aaron. I particularly thank those politicians kind enough to allow me to work with them at some point in the past, namely, Paul Lucas who gave me my first job in politics and is still a great source of advice and friendship and still has a burning passion for public policy, as well as Anna Bligh, Senator Chris Ketter, yourself, Mr Speaker, and Senator Anthony Chisholm. Anthony in particular encouraged me to run and helped me in other innumerable ways. When running a campaign, it is handy to have one of the best campaign minds in the country willing to offer advice and provide support when needed. There is no point reinventing the wheel in politics, and everything is done under the sun, so I am thankful for their advice along the journey.

I thank the Premier and the Deputy Premier for their support for what we were doing in Aspley during the campaign, and I thank my neighbouring Labor MPs for not minding too much when we pinched or borrowed their volunteers. I particularly thank the member for Sandgate who, despite having to run his own race, was instrumental in helping our campaign throughout. I also thank the member for Lilley, Wayne Swan, and Councillor Jared Cassidy for their support. I sincerely thank the union movement, particularly Chris Gazenbeek and the SDA, Gary O'Halloran and the Plumbers Union, Peter Biagini and the Transport Workers Union, and Ben Swan and Steve Baker at the Australian Workers' Union, who all were very supportive of our campaign from day one.

I acknowledge former MP Tracy Davis for her nine years as the member for Aspley. I particularly thank the former member for Aspley, Bonny Barry, who is doing it a bit tough at the moment but is certainly not taking it lying down. I am sure many other members here would share in my best wishes being sent to Bonny.

Lastly, and most importantly, I thank everyone in the electorate of Aspley who took time out to talk to me during the campaign, whether it be on pre-poll, while doorknocking or just answering the phone while I was interrupting their dinner. Those many conversations that people were very gracious to have with me all helped in giving me a clearer picture of what needs to be done locally and what I should be pushing for going forward. I will stand up for the people in my electorate. I will work hard and continue to lobby to improve the lives of all members of my community. I am incredibly humbled to represent them here in the Legislative Assembly of Queensland—and I am up for it.