



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

Hansard 4 August 1998

FIRST SPEECH

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (4.22 p.m.): It is an honour and a privilege to speak on behalf of the people of Logan. Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask you to pass on my congratulations to the Speaker on achieving that high office. I wish him every success in his challenging role. In his absence, I congratulate my neighbour, the member for Woodridge, the Deputy Speaker, on his role of Chairman of Committees.

I am delighted with the Premier role for the member for Brisbane Central. I am pleased to see my friend the member for Moggill in his role as the Leader of the Liberal Party. Actually, I am satisfied with the new roles for everyone. His Excellency the Governor will be pleased. With the election of a Labor Government, he will continue to have his Rolls, which One Nation threatened to sell. I hope that, as our last Queen's representative, he is allowed to exit with dignity—and not in the back of a taxi.

I thank all Labor Party members and supporters in Logan who worked so tirelessly and unselfishly on my campaign—people such as Max, Jenny and Brendan; Cheryl, my electorate secretary; Jackie, who was Wayne Goss' electorate secretary for 15 years; Di, Steve and Melissa; and great friends over many years, such as Hazel and Peter, Tricia and Paul, Barry, Desley and Pat. Above all, I thank my wife, Catherine, my children, Lauren, Patrick and Gabrielle, and my mother. I thank my long-suffering father-in-law and mother-in-law, who are in the public gallery today. Without their support, the ups and downs over the years would have been much harder.

I come to this place to join colleagues I have known for decades: the Minister for Primary Industries, Henry Palaszczuk; the Treasurer, David Hamill; the Minister for Tourism, Bob Gibbs; and Don Livingstone, the former member for Ipswich West, who I am very confident will be re-elected to this place. They were all members of the Oxley Federal division which shaped my Labor politics. I must say that this seems a gentler place than some of the robust gatherings we had at the Redbank Plains meeting hall on those balmy Sunday mornings of long ago. Those old connections are very strong in this place. The Deputy Premier, Jim Elder, my friend David Beddall, the member for Rankin, and my predecessor, Wayne Goss, and his family lived there, so I was tutored by people who have set me very high standards.

I particularly praise Wayne and Roisin Goss for their contribution to Queensland's political life. A sad fact of the timing of the proroguing of the previous Parliament was that time was not devoted to honouring the retiring members. A tradition should be established in this Parliament of recognising people for their parliamentary service while they are alive instead of only at condolence motions. Wayne's contribution to the State's political life is immense. He set exacting standards for himself and those who served with him. He drove himself and the Government hard in a series of reforms designed to restore public faith in our political system after years of systemic corruption. Under Goss, the State was a lot prouder than it had been in the pre-Fitzgerald days and had a touch of quality, decency and honesty about it. Above all, Goss knew when it was time to go and went at his own choosing, with his dignity intact and the State's best interests at heart. In Logan he is respected because he introduced community services: better educational facilities, the new university campus, expanded health facilities and the beginnings of a passenger transport system. These were real achievements and people appreciated him for them. I praise also Roisin Goss for the dignified role she brought to the task of Premier's wife. She was always completely supportive and is deservedly held in deep affection by many Queenslanders.

In Logan, State Government can make a difference. It is 20 years since Russ Hinze drew a boundary taking Labor voters out of the National Party dominated shires of Albert and Beaudesert, thereby creating the City of Logan. There was no community of interest, only National Party self-interest. There was no community infrastructure, just urban sprawl. There was no public transport except a train that stopped at Beenleigh and the odd bus—and one confused bus that displayed "Taronga Park Zoo" as its destination. In 20 years, Federal and State Labor Governments have worked with the Logan City Council to bring better services to Logan City. Much has been achieved but more needs to be done.

At the outset, I want to praise the hidden people, those many people who work without recognition and adequate funding to improve the Logan community. I assure them I will be working with them to help build a better community. I commit myself to fight for improved passenger transport infrastructure and reliable passenger transport.

Reliable transport running west to east to the hospital and TAFE college would be an enormous economic advantage for many struggling families. It would lessen the need for a second car in many cases. At Logan Hospital, the numbers of patients who fail to arrive for appointments each month is about 600. Some of that is caused by the mobility of the population, but largely it is created by families unable to arrive because of a lack of public transport.

Access to expanded local health facilities is a right that Logan people demand. Stage 4 of Logan Hospital is progressing despite massive underspending on it last year. I will be fighting for new health services for Crestmead. I urge the Health Minister to monitor the health service delivery in Logan West. Indeed, I urge all Ministers to view Logan West as a huge growth centre in the southern corridor and have their departments place offices there. With the southern bypass and the Logan Motorway, Logan West has easy access to the State's east and west.

Population growth creates a need for more police with more resources. Browns Plains police perform a top job in difficult circumstances and service a huge population. Expanding the police station so that more police can be accommodated is a top priority. The station has one of the worst civilian staffing to police staffing ratios in Queensland. Improving this ratio would free up operational police for Police Beat work.

The best social security we can give anyone is a job. This will be enhanced with more educational opportunities. The last census showed that Logan had the State's second lowest number of people with a qualification. By "qualification", I mean either a trade or tertiary degree. Pauline Hanson said on the Sunday program that children could leave school at 15. The inevitable result of that would be to condemn our youth to permanent unemployment, because mechanisation has replaced the jobs previously done by the young unskilled.

The prospects for obtaining and retaining long-term employment are improved with better education. Students are studying at school longer, but further progress is needed. Today, I commend the Minister for Public Works and Housing for being so attentive to the needs of the schools in the Logan electorate. I also want to thank the Minister for Education for already giving Logan schools a far better deal than they ever received over the past two and a half years.

Logan West needs greater access to training for the emerging jobs in the services and information sector. Otherwise people will be left behind permanently. The Government's establishment of an Information and Technology Department shows that it understands where future jobs will be created. I want Logan's unemployed to be part of that change. Logan TAFE must extend its information technology and training services into Logan West suburbs so that young families and youth can access them.

Calls for Government expenditure ultimately depend upon a redistribution of the wealth created in the State. Our State's economy is still heavily dependent upon primary production and mineral wealth. This year, income from both of those sectors will decline although, because of the dollar, trade volumes may improve. We need to trade but, above all, we need the goodwill of our trading partners. Short-term political considerations should not place these at risk. The coalition's preference tactic to put One Nation ahead of Labor may have been in its own political interests but it certainly was not in Queensland's interests. The deal resulted in a group that would have won only one or two seats being elevated to party status. The impact in Asia should be a warning to us all.

Some will maintain that Pauline Hanson is unknown in Asia. However, I have here some newspaper clippings from Asian newspapers where she is written about in a way that suggests that she is familiar to the readership of those countries. The highly respected Far Eastern Economic Review conducted a poll that showed that 69.8% of executives polled in 10 Asian nations were less keen to invest and do business in Australia as a direct result of Hanson's impact. The most alarmed were business people in Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia, where more than 75% now thought less of Australia.

This is a high figure, but it is a figure exceeded by the proportion of Queenslanders who did not vote for One Nation. Especially worrying for Queensland was Hong Kong, where Queensland has a trade office. Business people there were the most negative in their reactions. The Taiwan Central News Agency reported the cancellation of a tourist visit by 30 millionaire members of an investment tour group and property owners with interests on the Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast.

The tourism and education sectors are worth billions a year but both rely heavily on Asian finance. If we allow perceptions of intolerance and racism to go unchallenged, it will be at the very real cost of investment and job opportunities. The fear felt by Australians of Asian descent in Logan indicates that that perception has become a reality.

I welcome the Premier's early trip to Asia and I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that a trip to China is needed. However, it is needed all the more because of the coalition's preference deal, which undermined our image in Asia. The Government should be commended for its swift action to improve our tourist and trade image and the expansion of apprenticeships. Only by improving Queensland's wealth base can the Government's priority commitments to jobs and social justice be implemented. Queensland cannot afford or cannot risk the damaging, short-sighted policies advocated by One Nation. It is a party full of paranoia but no solutions. It is a party full of petty politicians with conspiracy theories. They are leaderless. They have plenty of problems, but not much promise. They are dangerous for people in Logan.

Today, Mrs Hanson's One Nation wants to divide people on the basis of race. When I was young, we dealt with the last remnants of the stigma of being born a Catholic. In Logan, some people are stigmatised because they are poor. People in public rental housing are stigmatised, as are blue collar and unskilled workers, sole parents, people with disabilities, the unemployed and others on social security— in other words, the marginalised.

Pauline Hanson says that she wants everyone treated equally. As a US Supreme Court judge said, probably after reading Aristotle, "There is nothing so unequal than the equal treatment of unequals." In Logan, we are trying to build a strong community uniting all of the groups. They are vulnerable to stigmatism and inequality. That is why Pauline Hanson and One Nation have to be challenged.

One hundred years ago in the 1890s, this State was gripped by economic depression and its society was wracked by bitter divisions. Despite those seemingly insurmountable problems, just a few short years later we created a nation. The challenges today may seem daunting, the competing interests difficult to reconcile and our sense of social unity and sense of fair go may seem frayed. The solutions then, as now, were not immediately obvious. However, turning in on ourselves as a fortress Australia, putting up trade barriers and finding scapegoats are admissions of failure, not visions for the future. Our State and our nation deserve better than that. We owe it to the people who put us here to canvass forthrightly the great issues of the day. In this way, Parliament can be a source of strength—a place in which the great suite of ideas, ambitions and tensions that abound in the wider community can be debated. That is the true role of the Parliament.

Over 100 years ago, Queensland produced the first Labor Government in the world. Given the social and economic progress made by Queensland Labor Governments this century, it is entirely fitting that Labor has again been called upon to lead, this time leading Queensland into the 21st century.
