



Speech by

**Hon. S. ROBERTSON**

**MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK**

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Hansard 5 November 1992

### FIRST SPEECH

**Mr ROBERTSON** (Sunnybank) (4.40 p.m.): It is indeed a great honour to rise for the first time as the member for the new electorate of Sunnybank. Mr Speaker, I begin by congratulating you on your re-election to the Chair of this House. I also offer my congratulations to the Government on its re-election and I look forward to serving my time as a member of the second Goss Labor Government. The fact that I am able to address the House today is in no small way due to the significant reform program upon which the first Goss Labor Government embarked in 1989. It was this Government's commitment to electoral reform that resulted in the abolition of the gerrymander and its replacement with a far more just and democratic electoral system. The redistribution of electoral boundaries in 1991 was a vital part of this electoral reform process. The new seat of Sunnybank was one of the seats borne out of this distribution.

If those members on the Government side of the House had a sense of pride in 1989 in being part of the first Labor Government in Queensland in 32 years, then it is with an equal amount of pride that I stand before the House today as a member of Parliament representing a seat created out of one of the most significant and fundamental reforms seen in Queensland in decades. Therefore, at this stage it is appropriate that I give recognition to the members of the former seats which, in part, make up my new electorate. Len Ardill, Judy Spence, Laurel Power, Bill D'Arcy and the Premier, Wayne Goss, are acknowledged as members who have all given sound representation to their areas and who have all contributed to my election in Sunnybank.

As the representative of the new seat of Sunnybank, I am deeply grateful to the many people who worked tirelessly and selflessly towards gaining what was an important Labor election victory. In particular, I would like to mention my campaign director, John Park, his wife Penny and children, Anna and Alex, who put up with me and the disruption to family life that a political campaign causes for almost 12 months. To the members of my campaign team, Ian and Anne Smillie, Sybil Ross, Les and Joan Watts, Eddie and Denise Redfern, Rachelle Francis and, in particular, my very good friend Alderman Linda Holliday, I thank them for their support, encouragement, and downright hard work during the campaign. I also acknowledge the support given to me by the members of the Sunnybank branch of the Australian Labor Party. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family, my father Bill, my mother Una, and my sister Lesley for their very special commitment and support over such a long period. I hope that when all of those people who are my friends and supporters read this speech, they will consider that their efforts, commitment and support have been worth while.

I mentioned that the Labor victory in Sunnybank was an important one. It was important in the sense that the voters in Sunnybank not only had a choice between candidates from three different political parties but also, and significantly, they were given a stark choice between style of candidates and their respective political campaigns. I am proud to say that the electors of Sunnybank joined with the rest of Queensland in rejecting the negative, mud-slinging, guttersnipe tactics of the Liberal Party. The electors of Sunnybank saw through the lies and distortions, the personal attacks and innuendos perpetrated by the Liberals at both State and local levels and gave a resounding "No" to their candidate in Sunnybank, as they did throughout Queensland. Clearly, Queensland electors have said to the Liberals, "We are far more intelligent than you think we are. We deserve to be treated a lot better and we will not support you until you climb out of the gutter and treat us with dignity." However, the Liberals still have not learnt their lesson. The same contempt for ordinary people that the Liberals demonstrated

in Queensland by hiring an American campaign director, by importing the worst and most divisive of political tactics, is being repeated by their leaders in Canberra. The relevance of that important point will be demonstrated in the context of the ongoing job creation and industrial relations reform program outlined in this Government's 1992-93 Budget.

As one would expect from a caring, compassionate Government, the 1992-93 Budget focuses upon getting as many Queenslanders as possible a job, given the role and constraints upon any State Government in Australia. However, should the recently announced Federal Liberal Party's industrial relations package—dubiously entitled Jobsback; more accurately described as Jobsack—be implemented after the next Federal election, the success of this Government's Budget initiatives could well be put at risk. One of the central features of the 1992-93 Budget is to use micro-economic reform to facilitate the major initiatives and policy announcements in areas such as industry development and training and employment. A constant feature throughout the major announcements contained in the Budget is that where the need for change has been recognised, that change will be managed by the Government in consultation with the appropriate interest groups.

In building on the Government's Leading State initiatives, the Budget contains a number of important industry development announcements, such as the commencement of a coal export incentive package to boost the competitiveness of Queensland's coal industry; the implementation of an information technology industry strategic plan; increased funding for the Queensland export development scheme, and further assistance to Queensland's important tourist industry, including Government funding for the resurrection of Compass airlines. Such incentives require more than the injection of money by a Government; they require a positive environment in which growth is possible with the minimum disruption to operations. For that reason, the Government has announced in the Budget a proposal to further amend the Industrial Relations Act to provide industry with increased flexibility and workplace agreements relevant to the industry and to individual workplaces. Unlike the industrial relations policy of the federal Liberal and National Parties, the Government's industrial reforms will result in workplace change that will complement the development of new industries, not polarise management and workers. It is about protecting workers' fundamental rights while facing up to the economic challenges of today.

What chance will Queensland have to succeed with its \$6m export incentive scheme if the significant reforms that have already occurred and are continuing to occur on Australian waterfronts are destroyed by an industrial relations system that encourages employers, workers and their unions to tear one another apart on fundamental questions such as award coverage and union recognition? Commendably, the Government has announced that this year some \$3.3 billion will be spent on capital works. More than 80 per cent of that program will be undertaken by the private sector. The last thing that Queensland needs, when workers' awards reach their expiry date halfway through a project funded by the Government, is for disputation to explode as employers and workers battle it out to establish a new workplace contract. Yet this is exactly what is being proposed by the federal Liberal Party and supported, as the Jobsback document states, by its Queensland counterparts.

The Liberals' policy—should they ever be in a position to introduce it—will put at risk the numerous positive incentives for industry development and job creation announced in this Budget and endorsed by the people of Queensland at the recent State election. Not even the draconian penal provisions against ordinary workers proposed by the Liberal Party will stop the polarisation of workplaces that will inevitably occur as a result of its confused and dangerously naive nightmarish industrial relations policy. I am amazed that commentators are referring to the Liberals' industrial relations policy as "new" and "radical". There is nothing new about what the Liberals propose. All they have done is given it a glossy cover and a trendy name. The principles, however, are almost as old as Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

I stand before the House today as a person who has worked in industrial relations and represented workers for almost 10 years, a person who witnessed the tragedy of the SEQEB dispute, the bloody-mindedness of the parties in the Bjelke-Petersen dam dispute, the terror and fear amongst Queensland workers denied fundamental rights of protection due to repressive industrial legislation, and the resultant low standard of wages and conditions for workers and their families in Queensland. I do not want to see those things happen again. We have come too far in the past three years. Yet that is what will occur should the coalition ever be in a position to introduce its policies.

Today, during question time, I was amazed that when the Deputy Premier listed the workers' conditions that had been abolished by the Liberal Government in Victoria, including penalty rates and annual leave loading, a member of the coalition called out, "Good stuff!" What an undisguised demonstration of contempt for the standard of living of ordinary working people. The people of Sunnybank want to share in the job-creation measures announced in this Budget. They want to take advantage of the business incentives and assistance packages; they want to apply for the additional TAFE places; and they want their share of the 2 400 public housing commencements that will begin this financial year. But what chance will they have to take advantage of those initiatives if there is

industrial anarchy? What chance will they have if their wages are dramatically slashed and their standard of living is reduced, or if they are thrown out of work if they refuse to accept their employers' terms and no longer have the protection of their award—an award historically determined by an independent umpire that is now threatened with extinction?

The people of Sunnybank, in common with people in the rest of Queensland, want jobs—jobs that are purposeful, secure and can provide a decent standard of living and quality of life for their families. They also recognise the importance of a progressive and stable union movement that has their interests at heart and can represent those interests maturely and effectively before their employers. They want some ownership over their future and their workplace. They do not want to have to rely upon some remote office of the employees' advocate to process their claims for workplace rights through an already congested and impersonal legal system. Industrial relations, like politics, is fundamentally about people. One cannot—as the Liberals are proposing—reduce industrial relations to a simplistic, legalistic problem. To do so demonstrates a complete lack of compassion and understanding towards the needs and aspirations of fellow Australians.

The changes to the Queensland Industrial Relations Act and the amendments foreshadowed in the Budget are creating the right kind of industrial environment—an environment in which industrial disputation is minimal and industry has confidence in its workers; an environment in which all parties recognise the need for change, to improve skills and education and to increase productivity. Importantly, that environment will be created through cooperation, not confrontation. And this is essentially the difference between this responsible, progressive Government and the reactionaries on the other side of the House—the very same reactionaries who want to pay our young people \$3 an hour for the privilege of entering the work force and contributing to the wealth of this nation.

The announcement in the Budget of nearly 20 000 new jobs will be of significant benefit to the electors of Sunnybank, particularly its young people. Sunnybank has 12 schools within its boundaries, including two major high schools, namely, Sunnybank State High School and Runcorn State High School, which are both schools of quality and pride. Since the election, I have had the pleasure of attending academic and sporting awards nights at both those schools and have been impressed by the level of commitment and excellence displayed by the students at those schools. Over 200 students from these schools will leave the secondary education system at the end of this year. The commitment by this Government to increase opportunities to enter the TAFE system, combined with planned job creation schemes, will be of significant benefit to these young people. The 12 schools in the Sunnybank electorate represent a challenge for any elected member. The commitment of the parents, their p. and c. associations, school administrations and teachers ensures that they are constantly striving to improve facilities. Currently, applications for funding for building projects such as the Sunnybank Hills State School assembly hall, the proposed Warrigal Road State School assembly hall and the expansion of the Runcorn State High School shelter, resurfacing of the Kuraby State School tennis courts and additional classrooms for Runcorn Heights State School and Sunnybank State High School are pending or about to be lodged. I hope that, with the positive reforms announced to education funding and expenditure in the Budget, these projects will be realised in the Sunnybank school community during my time as the member for Sunnybank.

The Sunnybank electorate, incorporating the suburbs of Sunnybank, Sunnybank Hills, Runcorn, Runcorn Heights, Eight Mile Plains, Underwood, Kuraby, Stretton and Calamvale continues to grow at a significant pace. A significant part of this growth is the result of new Australians, mainly from Taiwan and Hong Kong, settling in this area. The Taiwanese community in Sunnybank, in particular, has demonstrated a strong commitment to this State and to the local community. I am proud to say that I have established a close working relationship with this growing community through the Taiwan Friendship Association which is located in the Sunnypark Shopping Centre. I look forward to cementing this relationship by doing what I can to assist these new Australians to increase their participation in the local community.

Naturally, as the member of a fast-growing electorate, I am aware that there will be hard planning decisions to be made. However, I am confident that, with the continuing commitment of this Government to community consultation and the environment, we will achieve outcomes that will satisfy the concerns of local communities. Already this preparedness to listen to the community has paid dividends in the Sunnybank electorate. Prior to the election, residents of the Bellmead Street community in Runcorn expressed real concern about the future of a road corridor which dissected their estate. These concerns were relayed to the Minister for Transport who, at my invitation, visited the area and met with local residents. As a result of this inspection, the Minister announced that the road corridor would be relocated away from the estate for the purpose of future road planning. The 300 residents in that area can now be assured about the future of their neighbourhood and get on with their lives.

The Sunnybank electorate contains one of the most significant areas of bushland in the Brisbane City Council area—Karawatha. Much of Karawatha is privately owned and the threat of development eating into this area is a cause for real concern. The Brisbane City Council and, in

particular, Alderman Kevin Bianchi have been fighting hard to protect this bushland via the council's bushland acquisition program. Many residents of Sunnybank are concerned about the future of this bushland and have banded together to form the Karawatha Bushland Protection Society. This group of dedicated environmentalists has already benefited from this Government's commitment to protecting our environment through the receipt of a \$750 grant in 1992 from the Department of Environment and Heritage. However, we need to do more if we are to ensure that this bushland is protected now and for future generations. I am therefore amazed that the opposition leader in the council, Alderman Bob Ward, would criticise the council for its borrowing arrangements with the State Government to increase the pool of funds available to buy back bushland in Brisbane. As the alderman for Runcorn, he is well aware of the threat to the future of Karawatha, yet he lacks either the vision or the common sense to realise that the council needs assistance from other levels of Government to protect valuable bushland. His ignorance of the desire by residents to protect their local environment has not gone unnoticed by the people of the ward of Runcorn, and by the people of Brisbane in general.

As you are aware, Mr Speaker, before entering Parliament I was the State secretary and national president of the United Firefighters Union, a union which represents Queensland's 1 700 professional firefighters. It is a proud and effective organisation which has, over the past 10 years, been at the forefront of the debate for change and reform in this vital service. This Government's record of achievement in upgrading the Fire Service is commendable. I acknowledge the commitment by the current Minister for Housing and Local Government whilst he was the Minister responsible for fire services to reform the administration and operation of the service. He achieved much whilst he was the Minister and was prepared to make the tough decisions that the former National Party Government was not prepared to make lest it offended its friends whom it had stacked on the now abolished 81 fire brigade boards in Queensland. I have a continuing interest in the Fire Service and other emergency services. It continues to be a time of great change in these services and I look forward to participating in and contributing to this important area of government.

I have never considered my interest and activities in the fire services to be narrowly focussed. The Fire Service is increasing in importance to our society, particularly in the area of environmental protection. The Fire Service is not just about extinguishing fires or rescuing entrapped persons at motor vehicle accidents. It is also about conducting itself in such a manner that, firstly, prevents fires which may cause significant environmental damage and, secondly, extinguishing fires in a way that minimises the damage to our environment. To achieve these aims the Fire Service must be appropriately resourced and its staff properly trained and educated. The last three years have seen significant progress in addressing these challenges. There is, however, still a long way to go.

In conclusion, let me again say that it is a great honour to represent the people of the Sunnybank electorate. I am proud to represent not just those who gave me their support on election day but all the citizens of my electorate, irrespective of their personal political views. I am indeed grateful to have been given this opportunity to work towards bettering the lives of all Queenslanders. I am fully aware that the position I now hold carries with it significant responsibilities. The people of Sunnybank have put their trust in me. I do not intend to let them down.

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