

QUEENSLAND BROADCAST NO. 16

THE SENATE

SUNDAY 6 JULY 1975

WHEN SENATOR BERT MILLINER DIED LAST WEEK QUEENSLAND LOST ONE OF ITS ABLEST AND BEST LOVED PARLIAMENTARIANS. BERT MILLINER WAS A FAMILY FRIEND OF MINE, SO IT'S NATURAL THAT I SHOULD FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT HIM. BUT LET ME JUST SAY THIS: HE SERVED HIS UNION, HIS PARTY AND THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT FOR MORE THAN A QUARTER OF A CENTURY WITH GREAT DISTINCTION AND THE UTMOST INTEGRITY. MY COLLEAGUES AND I WILL MISS HIM KEENLY.

I WAS SORRY TO SEE, WITHIN A FEW HOURS OF HIS DEATH, A WELTER OF SPECULATION IN THE MEDIA ABOUT WHETHER THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT WOULD APPOINT ANOTHER LABOR SENATOR TO REPLACE HIM. I DON'T WANT TO SOUND SANCTIMONIOUS ABOUT THESE THINGS, BECAUSE WE ALWAYS HAVE TO FACE THE REALITIES OF POLITICS; BUT THE POINT IS THAT AT NO STAGE SHOULD THERE HAVE BEEN THE SLIGHTEST DOUBT ABOUT THE PROPER AND HONOURABLE COURSE FOR THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES. YET WHAT HAPPENS? THE QUEENSLAND PREMIER STALLED. HE REFUSED TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIS CLEAR OBLIGATION TO REPLACE SENATOR MILLINER WITH ANOTHER SENATOR FROM THE SAME PARTY. HE WENT ON ABOUT THE NEED TO CONSIDER THE MATTER, TO KEEP THE PRIME MINISTER GUESSING - AS IF THE INTERESTS OF QUEENSLAND VOTERS WERE THE LAST THING THAT MATTERED.

YOU'LL REMEMBER THAT WHEN SENATOR LIONEL MURPHY RESIGNED FROM THE SENATE EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT FLEW IN THE FACE OF THE LONG-ESTABLISHED AND HITHERTO UNBROKEN CONVENTION THAT CASUAL VACANCIES IN THE SENATE SHOULD BE FILLED BY A PERSON OF THE SAME PARTY AS THE SENATOR WHOSE PLACE WAS BEING TAKEN. MR LEWIS SHOULD HAVE HAD NO HESITATION IN DOING THE RIGHT AND PROPER THING - IN STICKING BY THE RULES OF THE GAME. INSTEAD HE DECIDED TO PLAY IT SMART. HE BROKE THE RULES AND APPOINTED A NON-LABOR MAN. IT DIDN'T MATTER TO HIM THAT HIS OWN PARTY, INCLUDING MR SNEDDEN - WHO WAS THEN ITS LEADER - AND EVEN THE SENATE ITSELF URGED HIM TO STICK BY THE RULES AND DO THE PROPER THING. HE BROKE ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL CONVENTIONS OF OUR DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM. AND WHENEVER THAT HAPPENS THERE IS ALWAYS A TEMPTATION TO BREAK THE RULES AGAIN. THE ROT SETS IN. ONCE A RULE IS BROKEN, OR A CONVENTION DEFIED FOR THE SAKE OF SHORT TERM POLITICAL ADVANTAGE, THE WHOLE SYSTEM IS WEAKENED. SO IT'S NOT SURPRISING THAT MR BJELKE-PETERSEN HAS BEEN TEMPTED, AND NO DOUBT ENCOURAGED, TO "DO A LEWIS". I CAN ONLY SAY THAT WHILE MR BJELKE-PETERSEN AND I HAVE OUR DISAGREEMENTS OCCASIONALLY, I HAVE A CERTAIN RESPECT FOR HIM. I AM HOPEFUL THAT IN SENATOR MILLINER'S CASE HE WILL DO THE RIGHT AND PROPER THING AND APPOINT A LABOR PARTY SUCCESSOR. QUITE FRANKLY, IT WILL BE SCANDALOUS IF HE DOES OTHERWISE.

NO DOUBT THERE ARE ELEMENTS IN THE OPPOSITION WHO FEEL THAT, BY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF A SENATOR'S DEATH, THEY CAN BOOST THEIR OWN NUMBERS IN THE SENATE AND BE ABLE MORE EASILY TO BLOCK THE GOVERNMENT'S LEGISLATION. WHAT WE HAVE TO REMEMBER IS THE SHEER INIQUITY OF THESE TACTICS. IT CANNOT BE STRESSED TOO OFTEN THAT THE OPPOSITION HAS NO RIGHT WHATEVER TO BLOCK GOVERNMENT MEASURES FOR WHICH THE PEOPLE HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR SUPPORT THROUGH THE BALLOT BOX. A LITTLE WHILE AGO MR FRASER WAS MAKING MUCH OF HIS NEW-FOUND SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN DECLARING THAT THE OPPOSITION WOULD NOT FRUSTRATE THE ELECTED GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM. IN FACT, THE OLD CAMPAIGN OF OBSTRUCTION HAS CONTINUED AS BEFORE. I CAN GIVE YOU A WHOLE LIST OF BILLS WHICH HAVE BEEN REJECTED OR DELAYED OR UNACCEPTABLY AMENDED IN THE SENATE - OUR REDISTRIBUTION PROPOSALS, OUR BILL TO MODERNISE AND SIMPLIFY THE ELECTORAL LAWS, OUR BILLS TO ABOLISH APPEALS TO THE PRIVY COUNCIL, TO ESTABLISH A SUPERIOR COURT OF AUSTRALIA, TO DEAL WITH SHADY PRACTICES IN THE SECURITIES INDUSTRY AND ~~THE~~ THE STOCK MARKETS, TO ESTABLISH A GOVERNMENT PURCHASING COMMISSION, TO PROVIDE SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS FOR THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

EVEN MORE SERIOUS THAN THESE ABUSES IS THE BELIEF, FOSTERED BY THE OPPOSITION AND ITS FRIENDS, THAT THE OPPOSITION CAN FORCE AN ELECTION WHENEVER IT SUITS THEM. I ASK AUSTRALIANS TO KEEP IN MIND THE ENORMITY, THE MONSTROUS INJUSTICE OF THIS PROPOSITION. UNFORTUNATELY THIS IS ONE MORE CASE OF A RULE ONCE BROKEN BEING EASIER TO BREAK AGAIN. WE ALL KNOW THAT THE OPPOSITION LAST YEAR FORCED AN ELECTION AHEAD OF TIME BY REFUSING SUPPLY IN THE SENATE. THE SENATE WAS ABLE TO TURN OUT A GOVERNMENT DULY ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE ONLY 16 MONTHS BEFORE! THE OPPOSITION PAID HEAVILY FOR THAT, BUT THERE IS LITTLE SIGN THAT THEY HAVE LEARNT THEIR LESSON OR ACKNOWLEDGED, NOT JUST THE FOLLY, BUT THE SHEER IMMORALITY OF THEIR ACTION. GOVERNMENTS INEVITABLY HAVE THEIR UPS AND DOWNS, AND *OF COURSE THE* GOVERNMENT IS GOING THROUGH A VERY STICKY PATCH AT THE MOMENT. BUT WE HAVE TO KEEP IN MIND THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF ALL WESTMINSTER-STYLE DEMOCRACIES: GOVERNMENTS ARE MADE AND UNMADE, NOT IN THE UPPER HOUSE, NOT IN THE SENATE, BUT IN THE LOWER HOUSE, THE PEOPLE'S HOUSE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. GOVERNMENTS WOULD BE QUITE UNWORKABLE IF THEY COULD BE TOSSED OUT BY AN UPPER HOUSE HALF WAY, OR EVEN A THIRD OR A QUARTER OF THE WAY THROUGH THEIR TERMS MERELY BECAUSE IT SUITED THE OPPOSITION TO EXPLOIT A TEMPORARY ADVANTAGE.

I WAS APPALLED THE OTHER DAY, FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN PREMIER, SIR CHARLES COURT, SAID THAT THE DECISION ON WHETHER TO HAVE AN ELECTION WAS ENTIRELY ONE FOR MR FRASER. THE DECISION HAS NEVER BEEN ONE FOR MR FRASER. IT IS NOT A DECISION FOR THE SENATE; STILL LESS IS IT A DECISION FOR THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION. BUT IF PEOPLE KEEP SAYING THAT MR FRASER IS THE ONE TO DECIDE, EVENTUALLY A FEW PEOPLE WILL BELIEVE IT. IT'S THE OLD TECHNIQUE OF THE BIG LIE - THE LIE REPEATED OFTEN ENOUGH TILL IT GAINS RESPECTABILITY. THE WHOLE IDEA IS INTOLERABLE, A TRAVESTY OF JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY. THE PEOPLE ELECTED THE GOVERNMENT FOR A NORMAL THREE-YEAR TERM. THEY ELECTED US TO CARRY OUT A PROGRAM. WE ARE DOING JUST THAT AND IN DUE COURSE, WHEN THE TIME COMES, WE WILL SUBMIT OURSELVES TO THE PEOPLE'S JUDGMENT. IT WOULD BE ABSURD IF AN ELECTED GOVERNMENT IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WERE TO DEPEND ON THE CHANCE EXPLOITATION OF THE HEALTH OF INDIVIDUAL SENATORS OR OBSCURE TECHNICALITIES IN THE SENATE VOTING SYSTEM. AMID ALL THE CLAMOUR AND HYSTERIA OF THE MOMENT, ALL THE RED HERRINGS AND UNSUBSTANTIATED CHARGES OF THE OPPOSITION AND THE SENSATIONALISM OF THE PRESS, REMEMBER THAT IT IS THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WHICH ALONE DETERMINES WHO SHALL BE THE GOVERNMENT OF THIS COUNTRY.
