



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILLS

**Fair Indexation of Military
Superannuation Entitlements Bill 2012**

First Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 29 October 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

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Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (10:49): War comes on very unpredictably. There was a man called Chamberlain who walked into the British parliament and announced, 'We don't have anything to worry about because we have peace in our time,' and he waved a letter around that he had got from another man called Mr Adolf Hitler, saying that he had no designs upon Europe and there was nothing to worry about. There was no effort made to increase the military budget or the military preparedness of Great Britain. If my memory serves me correctly, within a year or a year and half of that statement, Britain lost her entire army at Dunkirk, in the sense that the personnel got home, but they were not to take their rifles. Most of them swam or waded out from the beach. They took the bolts of their rifles with them. All of the tanks, artillery pieces and rifles were left behind, and Britain was left without an army to protect itself. It had a very great navy but no army.

In Australia, in this parliament, in this place, Mr Curtin got up and said that he was wonderfully pleased and we should not involve ourselves in any wars in Europe, we had nothing to worry about and European wars did not concern us, and he stridently spoke out against any increases in the military budget. The government believed and assured the people of Australia that we did not have anything to worry about. There was nothing pending and there was no necessity to increase military spending. Both sides agreed that there was no problem.

Within two years, Brigadier General Mackay presented to the cabinet of Australia a paper in which he said: 'We can't possibly defend Australia. All we can defend is the narrow coastline stretching from Brisbane to Sydney and Melbourne and across to Adelaide.' It was not a Brisbane line; the whole of Australia was handed over except the small area that was all that the tiny little army and security services that we had could defend. Then General Blamey, the commander of the Australian forces, said that if the Japanese took Port Moresby—and they were two weeks away from taking Port Moresby; 15,000 had landed at Rabaul—we had 3,000 militia in battalions who were unfit and untrained and had virtually no machine guns at all to stop them. If they took Port Moresby, there would be no way of stopping them from invading Australia.

In preparation for that invasion, something like 50 or 60 sorties and bombings of Darwin took place. Horn Island was bombed. Bamaga was bombed. Townsville was bombed. Cairns was bombed. Kalumburu was bombed. Some 72 ships off the Australian coastline were sunk in preparation for the invasion. Newcastle and Sydney both had bombs dropped upon them, albeit only one or two.

So war comes on very quickly, and we must call upon our security forces, our Army, Navy and Air Force, to defend us. Even when the war broke out, we did not worry much in Australia because Britain said she would come over and save us if anything happened over here, not that anything was likely to happen over here. The Americans stood between Australia and Japan. If the worst came to the worst, the Americans would save us. Quite frankly, neither of them saved us. The Battle of Milne Bay and the Battle of Kokoda were fought by Australians, preventing the Japanese from taking Port Moresby, and it was only the Australians that prevented the taking of Port Moresby.

The Fair Indexation of Military Superannuation Entitlements Bill 2012 is to look after our soldiers. It is an expression from the Parliament of Australia, representing the people of Australia, that we appreciate what you do.

We appreciate that, if you are in the services now, you will almost certainly be sent to Afghanistan at some time and that, if you are sent to Afghanistan, you have a one in 400 or one in 500 chance of dying. According to the newspaper reports—I have not checked them—39 deaths have taken place in Afghanistan. Those of us who attend the funerals of the people from our areas—as I attended the funeral of Ben Chuck, a commando, in Yungaburra—will never forget them.

Yet we say to our troops: 'You are substandard. You do not deserve the same arrangements as other pensioners. You do not deserve the arrangements we in this parliament enjoy.' Our remuneration is tied to average weekly earnings and our pensions are tied to whichever is the better deal out of average weekly earnings and the CPI.

But these men who risk their lives for their country are confined to the CPI. Don't you think that they are being told that we do not care about them—that they are expendable? Could there be a worse message to send to the parents and relatives of Ben Chuck and all the other Ben Chucks?

We are fighting wars. I was handed a rifle when I was 18 years of age. I heard John F. Kennedy and I thought we were all going to go to war—as did everyone in my senior class at Mt Carmel School after hearing him speak on that famous day. But then it blew over and the world was gay and happy—because there was not going to be any war. But, 18 months later, I was carrying a rifle and I had to give three telephone numbers to my commanding officer. I was on 24-hour call to go and fight in Indonesia. That war was about protecting our oil pipeline.

There is a bit of get even and get square about the war in Afghanistan—and we do not blame the Americans for that. They are fully entitled to get square. But ultimately, in my opinion, the war in Afghanistan is about protecting their oil pipeline. I think you have to fight a war to protect your oil pipeline. But I plead with people in this place to understand that, if you want to fight a war to protect an oil pipeline, don't you think the people in the Indonesian archipelago might get a bit upset when we cut off their food pipeline—when we sink the little boats they sail out here to try to catch fish to keep their families alive?

We are also fighting to protect the American alliance—and, quite frankly, we would ultimately have been invaded if it had not been for the Americans. Everybody knows that. We also provide peacekeeping forces—and we all want to make our contribution so that we do not see a repeat of the terrible things which have occurred in the past. An example of what can happen if you do not have a peacekeeping force is what happened in the Boer War. The British—and very sadly and to the shame of this nation, we were in there too—starved 26,000 women and children to death in the camps. They did so as government policy. If there had been a peacekeeping force to stop those greedy people like Cecil Rhodes, Barney Barnato and NM Rothschild, that concentration camp incident may not have occurred—and if that had not occurred, I do not think there would have been a First World War. There was no way the Germans were going to allow that to go unpunished. On their belts, it said, 'God is with us.' As a result of the Boer War, to some degree they were dead right—that God was with them. I speak not to condemn my own forces. I am very proud and honoured to sit under the portrait on my wall of Albert Anthony Henley, my great-grandfather's brother, who died at Gallipoli.

We are moving today that our servicemen and women get the same deal as everyone else in Australia. I cannot see how anyone on either side of this parliament can hold their head up straight or look a soldier or an ex-soldier in the eye unless they support this proposal.

We do not do this to blow our own trumpet. We would have been most happy for the government or the opposition to have moved this. I am quite sure the crossbenchers will very strongly support this bill. It will be voted upon and we hope that everyone votes for it. We very strongly commend the bill to the House.

Bill read a first time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore): In accordance with standing order 41, the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.