



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

ADJOURNMENT

South Sydney Rugby League Club

SPEECH

Thursday, 9 November 2000

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Albanese, Anthony, MP

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Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (11.10 am)—I rise today to place on record my concern about the decision by Justice Finn in the Federal Court last Friday to exclude South Sydney from the 2001 National Rugby League competition. I believe this tragic decision is a loss not just for South Sydney but for Rugby League, for the community and indeed for the legal system. There are no winners from last Friday's decision. It is about time that those who control Rugby League actually listen to public opinion and act in the interests of the game. South Sydney lost last Friday in the Federal Court, and I declare an interest as a member of the South Sydney Rugby League Board. However, this Sunday we will be taking this issue to the court of public opinion—the streets of Sydney. We will be gathering at Redfern Oval at noon to march to the Sydney Town Hall for a rally at 1 p.m. I expect that the figure of 40,000—the number of people who marched last October—at least will be matched on Sunday.

The court decision appears to suggest that perceived corporate interests can override community and moral concerns. This is one decision which cannot go unchallenged. The issue is about much more than sport. It goes to the very heart of the alienation which people are feeling about our society. It is indeed about whether the dollar can override all human and social relationships. It is against the history, spirit and tradition of Rugby League. No organisation can survive without its soul, and South Sydney is indeed, as the world's most successful Rugby League team, the soul of National Rugby League.

Rugby League certainly cannot survive if it is alienated from its supporters. The current Rugby League World Cup, in which countries such as Russia, Lebanon and the Cook Islands, et cetera, have teams in spite of having no Rugby League competition and no Rugby League players, is a farce. The fact is that a number of Rugby League players in Australia were rung up and asked which country they would play for—shopping around—even though they had no link at all to those nations. The lack of interest in the World Cup shows the farcical nature of the National Rugby League leadership and how out of touch they are with the fans. Last Friday was unique in that a Federal Court decision was televised live nationally on two channels. But, at the same time, no-one cares about the result of a game such as Australia versus Russia—110 to four—either at the game or at home watching it on TV. It shows where the whole thing went wrong in Super League in 1995—this view that Rugby League was a world game and that Andrew Ettinghausen, we were told, would be as well known internationally as Michael Jordan. It was never possible. Rugby League is a game played in Sydney, Brisbane, the coastal and country areas of those two states, Auckland and parts of England, but nowhere else. That does not mean it is not important. That does not mean that it does not play a vital role in the lives of those people who I am proud to march with on Sunday and who I was proud to stand with last Friday at South Sydney Rugby League Club—people who had their hearts broken by this callous decision.

The courts should not be making the decision, of course. The NRL can put South Sydney in the competition tomorrow. The Auckland Warriors fell over because they could not even pay their players from last year. They have renamed the team 'New Zealand Warriors' in order to get out of their financial obligations. At the same time, a team like Souths is told that there is no place for them in the competition. The leadership of the NRL is out of touch. The head of the NRL, David Moffatt, could not even be bothered coming to the court to hear the decision, showing contempt for those people—those battling Australians—who have gone out and fought for South Sydney to remain in the competition. As the song goes, 'South Sydney marches on,' and they will be marching on Sunday. (*Time expired*)