



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Battle of Eureka

SPEECH

Monday, 26 November 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Broadbent, Russell, MP

Source House
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Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (12:47): I commend the member for Fraser for his introduction of this most important motion, the contribution made by the member for Riverina, which was interesting, and the one by the member for Wakefield, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Having said that and having heard the contributions and the outline of the motion that is before us, I applaud the sentiment that is in that motion, because, as the member for Wakefield says, he talked about character, what formed the Australian character, why we are like we are—and we are accordingly a little different, especially when it comes to authority—but let us not go there too far today, especially in this week for me.

I would put to you, Deputy Speaker, that for me this is about one man, one flag, one arrest and one spirit. The one man was Peter Lalor; he stood in that meeting and said, 'I will lead'. He did not say, 'Pick me, pick me', he said, 'I will lead.' He was the only voice that stood in the meeting and said, 'I will lead.' This Irishman stood up and said to this group of Australians who were being oppressed by the authorities, 'I will lead.' One man. One unique flag under the Southern Cross. One unique flag where they looked to the sky for their future, and it was the Southern Cross displayed on that flag that they were to come behind. One arrest. Who did they arrest? This is the best part of the whole story: they arrested the journalist; they arrested the local editor. Nobody else was jailed or arrested over this whole episode. Lalor, though damaged with his arm smashed to pieces and later taken off, was not arrested and eventually became a member of the Legislative Council. Isn't that just greatest story? Who did the authorities have a go at? They booked the journalists for—what was it?—seditious libel. Most of our journalists would be in jail and we would not have newspapers today if that were the case, especially with regard to the Prime Minister at the moment. But let's not go there! But can we be candid about the moment and also interested in the past? Yes, we can, because what happens today in Australia emanates from what happened then. If we had some of their principles and pride and we took the same pride and care in any allegation that is made towards people in leadership, perhaps there would be a lot less said in this place and in newspapers about our national leadership than is said today.

But then I add a caveat at the end, and the caveat at the end is one spirit. What has not been mentioned here today—although the member for Wakefield went very close to it—is the spirit of this nation that was born out of not just this one incident but also many incidents like it. But this was a turning point that said, 'We are Australians and we will not be oppressed.' What did Lalor say when he stood up and took that lead? What was the one word he used when he stood up? What was the first word he said? Yes, there was a small speech, but he said one word. That amazing one word was 'liberty'. He did not stand up and say, 'I will do the job. Excuse me; I will do it' He stood up and he said, 'Liberty.'

In the national consciousness, that word acquitted with his name made the difference at that time. Whether they were victorious was a typical Australian story. No, they failed. But they did not fail in spirit, because of the spirit they had created amongst the 500. The disastrous consequences for those around them and the revenge that was taken by the authorities was outrageous. So they lost on all accounts. They lost life and they lost and lost and lost. But, out of that loss, was born the spirit that we live with today that makes us the unique country that we are.