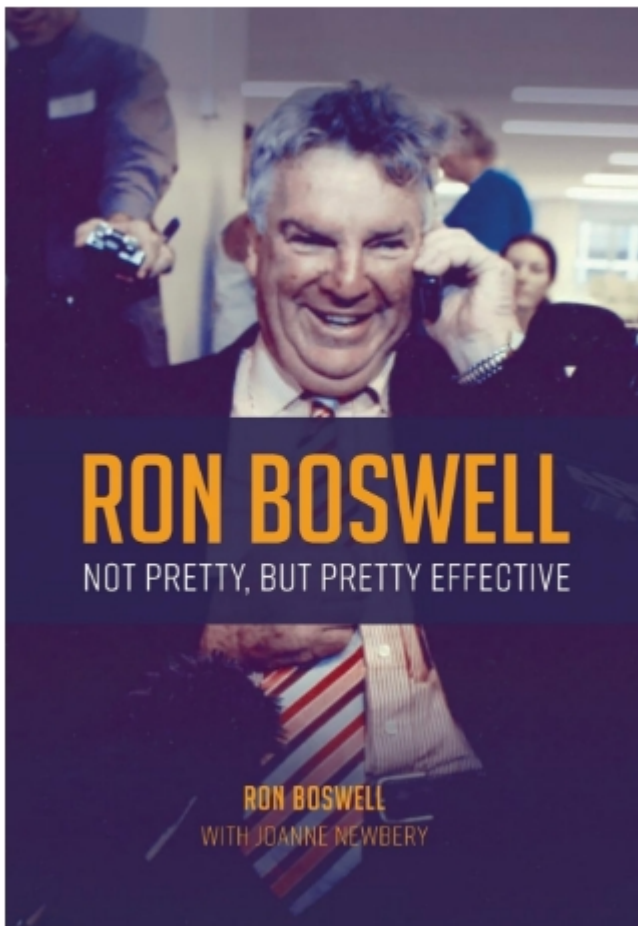


Book review: Ron Boswell, Not Pretty but Pretty Effective

By Samuel Chamberlain

Ron Boswell with Joanne Newbery
Connor Court, 2023, 317 pages, \$39.95

The vast, industrial interior of a Brisbane Port facility on a December morning was the perfect time and place to launch the biography of a Queensland Senator of the calibre of Ron Boswell. Surrounded by friends, family and political admirers,



Boswell in his address reiterated his commitment to the earthy business of just plain old business. It is a commitment that is clearly central in his new autobiography *Not Pretty, but Pretty Effective*. Despite the long trek out to the port of Brisbane to hear his remarks, it was a refreshing experience not to see another political biography book launch on the some-teenth level of some CBD office legal chambers. This is because too often the need for appearances dissipates upon leaving

political office and any pretence of false love for an MP or Senator's 'people' disappears. Think of former PM Malcom Turnbull, so relieved upon being axed as PM to no longer need to pretend to be of a centre-right political inclination. It is nice to know that Ron Boswell many years after leaving

office still has the blood of the national party and the industries they represent still coursing through him.

Ron Boswell, like so many for whom politics came to dominate their lives, paints his earlier career as something that just happened. As the saying goes *the world is run by those who turn up* and Ron just turned up. Ever wanting to put forward his genuine business credentials, the former Father of the House of Representatives made clear that his initial political involvement was minimal, although important, and done alongside his responsibilities as a business owner. One thing just led to another, providing him at first the ear of key players and the party establishment, and then later the support of those people when it came to running for preselection. People who make a success in their political stint are often seen exhibiting hindsight bias in assessing the ambition they exhibited in their early career. It makes for a lighter reading of history. The large swath of friends in the industrial hall at the book launch however, many having been friends for decades, and some having been present from the start, point to the notion that Boswell wasn't a pitiless careist in his early years. Now at a time when the average sitting politician sought safe party preselection from before they were able to join the young nats/liberals/labour it is refreshing to hear of stories whereby the nationals sought authentic community leaders. It was as if politicians were sought and not forthcoming. An overarching takeaway from the book is Boswell's utmost desire to improve the sourcing and promoting of genuine and decent political candidates across the political spectrum but absolutely in the National Party.

The book itself, if one was to only peruse the table of contents, reads like a litany of industry groups. A noteworthy amount of attention is paid to both prawns and canned peaches – both of these things were remarked upon by Christine Holgate at the book launch. It screams of practicality. But it also makes someone of a younger generation wonder if Senator

Boswell was a product of his time. He was the epitome of sensible and staunch conservatism – capable of standing up to lefty lunacy whilst being trusted to oppose and deal with far-right outlets like the League of Rights. But when lefty-lunacy of yesteryear is an unbalanced budget or excessive tree-hugging, it is hard to believe that such a politician in such an environment can flourish under the likes of COVID-19 imposed loss of freedoms. Talking endlessly about industry groups is exactly the sought of undertaking that the much despised moderate liberals of today do. “How good is (insert Australian product scheduled for Tuesday)” is the typical prose posted on their social media. The earthy production-centric view of politics that dominates Boswell’s biography is the exact opposite in this day in age of showing an aptitude for dealing with the abstract and central political debates of our time. Shonky trade practices won’t destroy Australia before cultural marxism and the totalitarian tendencies of the bureaucracy do.

A continuity of values becomes clear extending from the height of the Sir Joh days as premier to Tony Abbot’s prime ministership. It is a rich tapestry of every big national pride and debacle from the 1980’s to the 2010’s. Any major issue this man had a perspective, an insight, or was just there in the moment. As someone younger in years it saddens me to see a wealth of experience build up only for one day passing – knowing that not all one’s wisdom can be transferred in a biography. Both the Nationals and Liberals do a poor job of promoting their past heroes and when their heroes are of such a notoriety, such as PM’s, they do a poor job in defending them. This book is a solid defence of a career worth celebrating.