

INAUGURAL SPEECH OF THE HONOURABLE DANIEL MOOKHEY

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY [4.35 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Last Tuesday the Governor of New South Wales initiated the Fifty-sixth Parliament with a solemn reminder of the responsibilities we hold as parliamentarians. The Governor said:

You have been chosen by the community to represent them and act in their interests.

Over the next four years you will be called upon to act with integrity, wisdom, and sometimes courage.

I intend to always act with integrity. I hope to develop wisdom. As for courage, let me initiate my parliamentary career with a courageous declaration—courageous in the "Yes Minister" sense: I inform all 41 of my fellow members of the Legislative Council that they should rest easy as I am already striving for our collective unemployment. If I should ever have the chance to affirm the principle that the will of the people is expressed totally in the other place, if the chance arises to implement the Labor platform and if I can vote for our abolition, know this: I will.

Should members forgive me this trespass, should they overlook my intentions and should they reply to my insult by extending the hand of friendship, then members will discover that I, like them, know the honour and the privilege of sitting in this, Australia's oldest Legislative Chamber. Like them, I am humbled by being joined to the democratic tradition it embodies. And, like them, I delight in labouring each day for the party I represent as a member of a movement that I love in order to fulfil the mission set by His Excellency the Governor last Tuesday: to make a difference in people's lives in a real and meaningful way. I am grateful for the chance.

His Excellency the Governor is the thirty-eighth person to hold that office. The first arrived on this continent within walking distance of this very Chamber. That Governor arrived with 11 ships. Those 11 ships carried with them convicts. Over time the interplay between the convicts and their successors, and the Governor and his successors, would lead to the establishment of this Parliament, the Executive it supervises, as well as the judiciary, and it sits atop both. Those three institutions comprise the rudimentary elements of this land's political order, but they do not—and never have—comprised this land's first civilisation. Because this land has always been civilised: civilised by Indigenous people upon whose land we are today, Gadigal land. To their elders, both past and present, I offer my respects. And to all Australians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, I too am committed to the cause of true and lasting reconciliation so every Australian might enjoy the liberties innate to their citizenship and so they all are able to achieve their individual promise so that we, indeed, advance Australia fair.

My family's lineage does not include anyone who sailed on those 11 ships. If any ancestor of mine was a criminal, their capers were practised and, presumably enjoyed, in ancient India—the lands that are now known as Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. The earliest connection my family has to Australia dates to the life of my maternal grandfather. He was a lifelong soldier. His first war was the Second World War. He served as an infantry officer, a member of Montgomery's army. For the good field marshal,

my grandfather would patrol the North African desert searching for any sign of Rommel's thrust.

One day, after a long tour, it was my grandfather's turn to slumber in the comfort of a desert trench, dug for the collective benefit of his entire company. That night, out of nowhere, a German tank appeared atop a nearby hill. It collected every member of my grandfather's company—every member except him. Granddad was forced to wander the desert alone. He experienced incredible heat and thirst, and he saw visions of a monkey—a monkey shaped like Lord Hanuman, the Monkey God from Hindu lore. So for the rest of his life he would start each day by reciting the 40 verses of the *Hanuman Chalisa*, a hymn that tells Lord Hanuman's story, one of the most important hymns in Hinduism. Yesterday, in honour of my grandfather's memory, I took my pledge of loyalty holding a copy of the *Chalisa* and the *Bhagavad Gita* in my hand. It was the least I could do.

When my grandfather was rescued he was sent to a nearby base for some well-deserved rest and recuperation. It was there that he met Australians for the first time. Those Australians were also soldiers, fellow members of Montgomery's armies—men, and a few women, recovering from the vigorous defence of the northern-most port in Africa. Their mission was to deny the military richness of its position to the Desert Fox. They were a determined lot. Heat did not faze them. Hardship did not frighten them. They would awake for their daily beating, but then sleep, sporting the nonchalance that can only be possessed by the defiant.

Throughout that siege they showed tremendous pluck, and they never let that port go. And so, to mark their achievement, their reward was an eternal nickname: the Rats of Tobruk. I believe it was the memory of those Australians that meant my grandfather was happy to see his daughter and my mother join her husband in Australia in 1975. I am sure it was his familiarity with their character that meant he could delight in having three Australian grandchildren, all born in Sydney's west. I am sure he knew from their example that we would be educated in good public schools—schools like Hilltop Road Public School and Model Farms High School, and for Hugh McDermott, Girraween High School as well. I am sure he saw in the care those soldiers had for each other the care our fellow Australians would have for us, so that if calamity were to strike we would be cared for. We were—when my father passed away when I was five.

I am certain the Rats of Tobruk are the reason why granddad could forgive me the trespass of loudly cheering on Craig McDermott as he destroyed Srikanth and the entire Indian top order in the 1991 World Series. Periodically I reflect on the life led by my grandfather's generation, the generation now termed history's greatest. This was a generation that was born amidst the war to end all wars, but the errors of the interwar years meant that it was their destiny to come of age during another terrible war—the worst ever. What I admire the most about that generation is the restraint shown by the victors. Rather than interpreting their win as a cue for louder, more stringent triumphalism, those soldiers knew that the peace they had secured presented merely an opportunity for a more equal reconstruction. They were determined to ensure that the post-war order they would build would not be a pale imitation

of the old world's order that failed them, the order that had failed the world.

For the returning Australians reconstruction meant creating housing systems, schooling systems, healthcare systems and retirement systems that were expressions of the solidarity and mutualism they had known throughout their service. In time those systems would retard the nefarious influence of class in society's organisation. The result was one of the fairest societies the world has ever known. For the returning subcontinental soldiers, the need was for a different creed, a creed that could retrieve the subcontinent from the clutches of colonialism, a creed that could sustain nations where neither the caste of your birth, the colour of your skin, the gods you worshipped or the person you loved mattered. The only thing that mattered was your character.

For those soldiers the burden of forging that creed and starting that struggle did not fall on their shoulders alone because they were not returning to a subcontinent becalmed by inertia. Their subcontinent was marching; marching for independence, marching to the beat of non-resistance, marching under the banner flown by people named Patel and Nehru, Jinnah and Gandhi, marching for their freedom—all while writing the textbook about how the struggle for social justice should be waged and how it could be won. That textbook inspired people in places as far away as Selma and Soweto, in places as near as Walgett and Moree. It still inspires those in Cairo, South Sudan, Syria, and Tunisia. And it inspires me as well because the creation of a social State, and the march towards colour-blind society, are the best examples of change that could be wrought through a political life, of the scale of social transformation that is possible when politics is used for good.

There are counterexamples—examples of when politics is used for bad. Some examples originated from this side of the Chamber; some from the other side. But if the greatest generation has a legacy it is this: When politics results in the wrong choices, the right response is not to blame the system; the right response is to organise for a better result next time. This truth became clear to me in 1996. That is when I realised that if you change the government, you change the country. I did not like the changes that were happening then. I did not think they were fair. So I organised.

In high school organising meant cornering my schoolmates after the Federal budget, hectoring them about how the Liberal Government was slashing pensions, starving universities and reneging on its promise to act on child care. I still find that skill is in regular use. I have since learnt that organising means more than fighting for what you are against. Organising is the method by which you achieve what you are for. It is akin to a quest, a hard quest, with defeat, followed by setback, followed by regeneration, some reflection and—at least for the persistent—the chance of triumph.

Patience is the key. I have had the chance to learn patience from the master teachers of patience—from the Transport Workers Union of Australia [TWU]. The TWU has experienced its fair share of fights, bad headlines, bitter defeats and breathtaking betrayals. But it has survived and it has thrived, able to make and remake the social conditions of transport workers—garbos, baggage handlers, bus drivers, car carriers, port workers, as well

as ordinary truck drivers. The union is so resilient because no matter where the TWU goes, it is never in fear of any foe. Instead, it always keeps the union flag flying high. It kept that flag flying high when a national airline cancelled the flights of its customers so it could lock out its workers. It is flying that flag now, in the retail industry, where the ruthless use of market power leads to the death of too many transport workers.

The secret of the TWU's success is the grit of the union's leadership; people such as Wayne Forno, Michael Aird, Michael Kaine and Tony Sheldon—four leaders possessed of patience, fierceness and above all humility. All four are in the gallery tonight. All four took a chance on me. All four allowed me to observe them close up. All four let me participate in the union's decisions. All four shut me up when my participation became too extensive. Without those four I never would have had the chance to learn how to serve working people and I never would have had the chance to serve working people now. For that, I am grateful.

I am grateful to all my other friends in the trade union movement as well: Mark Lennon, Mark Morey and the whole team at Unions NSW; Alex Claasens, Bob Nanva, and my friends at the Rail, Tram and Bus Union; Graeme Kelly, Steve Binskin and the mighty United Services Union; Scott McDine, Dan Walton, Misha Zelinsky, Liam O'Brien and Russ Collinson from the great Australian Workers Union; Tara Moriarty at the Liquor and Trades Division of United Voice; Gerard Dwyer, Bernie Smith, David Bliss, Barbara Neibart and Joe De Bruyn from the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association; Steve Butler and the Electrical Trades Union; Paddy Crumlin, Mick Doleman and the Maritime Union of Australia; and Sally McManus and Linda White at the Australian Services Union.

I also mention Michael O'Connor, Dave Noonan, Tony Maher and Michael Flinn at the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union; Paul Bastian, Tim Ayres, Peter Cozens and my many friends at the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union; Nadine Flood and the Community and Public Sector Union; Geoff Derrick and the Finance Sector Union; the fierce Luke Hilakari and the even fiercer Victorian Trades Hall Council; my old workmates at the Australian Council of Trade Unions; especially my old leaders Dave Oliver, Ged Kearney, Michael Borowick and Carla De Campo; my other friends at the TWU, President George Clark, and Vice-President Charles McKay; Scott Connolly, Peter Biagini, Wayne Mader, Ray Wyatt, Tim Dawson, Dermot Ryan, Polo Guilbert-Wright, Mick Pieri, Richard Olsen, Mick Forbes and the entire NSW committee of management. Thank you. I have learned from you all.

Finally, at least as far as my union friends go, two leaders and their team are the finest example of courage I know. Two people who stood up to give their union its future back, who today lead it with such force, both of whom are fine friends of mine, people who taught me the meaning of grace under pressure: Gerard Hayes and Mark Sterrey. To you and to all my magnificent friends at the Health Services Union, I am proud of what we did together three years ago and I am proud of what you are doing now.

I accept that some object to the relationship between industrial and political labour; that they feel the relationship is merely a quirk of a party conference or, alternatively, an alliance for election time. But for those who are the labour movement's stewards, like me, there is a high degree of appreciation for the reason why political and industrial labour are the two wings of our great movement, why they have an entwined history and a joint fate. This is because both are devoted to working people's freedom, and freedom is the enduring mission of the labour movement. It means having the power and the right to act, speak or think as one wants. Freedom belongs to neither left nor right wing; it is a status. You are either free or you are not.

Labor wants people to be free, to have choice, to be in charge, to experience control and to feel secure. Labor's strategy to win freedom is power. Powerful people withstand powerful forces to deny them their freedom. Powerful people have security. Powerful people avoid deprivation, survive unemployment and make choices. Labor's method for securing people with their power is the collective. By acting jointly people have more power than acting individually. They withstand market forces to deny them their freedom and they withstand State actors who would deny them their freedom.

The power is not yielding; it is stubborn. As former Blair Government Minister James Parnell said, "Power needs to be organised, fought over, negotiated and resolved through compromise." This is a hard truth for some people to hear. People who wish that power can be clicked away one witty listicle at a time. But the realities of power cannot be ignored: who has it and what they do with it. Right now there is a widely held perception that power is held by too few in our market economy and too few in our democratic State; that the status quo is for the privileged and not the ordinary. This is a perception that is holding New South Wales back. We might be the largest State in the federation, the hub that connects this country to the most powerful circuits in the Asia-Pacific, but we will never fairly share the fruits of our enmeshment with our neighbours if the only people enmeshed are an echelon of the well-to-dos, with the want-to-do-wells left to pull themselves up by their own boot straps.

We might have the best environment, with the cleanest oceans, the best beaches and the most ancient rainforests, but that counts for nought if we commit ignorance and wilful blindness on our right and baseless political posturing on our left to delay the onset of the coming revolution in cleaner energy and renewable power; if we let them impede this State from adjusting to the truth of this century: that river flows matter as much as capital flows. We might have the best city in this country, with fantastic weather and a beautiful harbour, but if we continue to treat it like a mere collection of buildings and not like a community we will miss the chance to modernise its transport and housing, redesign its parks and libraries, and remould how we use the streets and neighbourhoods. We will miss the chance to make sure our cities are there for everyone.

These are complex problems, each enough to occupy the attention of a Parliament. They all require a detailed study, serious thought, as well as the jostling and the bargaining legislatures specialise in. But for real progress to be made we need to be willing to look at them anew,

with an openness to ideas and an investment in the outcome, not the method. Throughout my tenure in this place I will be looking at how we can use markets and how we can use States to make progress. I will be a public sector innovator and a private sector reformer. I do not wish for problems to linger, nor do I consider it wise to vacate the field for Canberra, or worse, Victoria.

I intend to strive for a State with a government for whom the mantle of progressive leadership sits easily on its shoulders, that is willing to again make New South Wales the pacesetter in the race towards national modernisation. That will be a Labor government, that will be a Foley government and I am thrilled to join the team. I understand that each person who sits in this Chamber constitutes an investment made by their party and I understand that that investment is much greater if the party is in opposition. I close tonight by paying tribute to the people who have made their investment in me: firstly, the men and women that comprise the membership of the Australian Labor Party. One of the earliest Labor parliamentarians to sit in this Parliament, George Black, said Labor was the party that sought for working people "a little more of the world's pleasure, leisure and treasure". To the members of the Australian Labor Party, I think it is a pleasure to act on your behalf. I will not treat this responsibility like leisure, but I will treasure forever the honour you have bestowed on me: member of Parliament, Labor.

To my Labor colleagues in this Chamber: for your advice, your grace, the late night chats and your patience—thank you. I am eager to serve with you and please remember my thanks when I stuff up. To my fellow members of the upper House class of 2015, especially my old friend Courtney Houssos, congratulations on your election. May our exchanges be robust, our insults cutting, but our careers constructive. To my good friends Greg Warren, Chris Minns, Jo Haylen, Hugh McDermott, and all the new Labor members elected to the other place in 2015: your election is the best rejoinder to the critics who, like Chicken Little, constantly predict the demise of the great Australian Labor Party. Congratulations, and I look forward to serving with you.

To leader Luke Foley and to members of the Opposition frontbench—especially Adam Searle, Walt Secord, Sophie Cotsis, Michael Daley, Penny Sharpe, Ryan Park and Mick Veitch—it would be a pleasure to watch you make a difference. To work with you as well is a bonus—thank you. To John Robertson—for serving our movement in one of its darkest hours, and for taking an interest in me in all of the roles you have held—thank you. It is an honour to be in the same Parliament as you. To my general secretary Jamie Clements, who was a shepherd for so many when we were in Young Labor, and is now shepherding our party back to government: we are a party greatly swelled in numbers. We are united and we are modern. That is because of you—thank you.

To Kaila Murnain, David Latham, Dom Ofner and all the other hardworking party officials at the New South Wales branch, there are so many MPs in this Parliament that owe their election to your good cheer, your great judgement and, above all, your hard work—thank you. To Harish, Aisha, Ejaz, Moninder and all my friends at Sub-Continental Friends of

Labor—thank you for organising in Australia's fastest growing communities. To my friends Paul Erickson and Seb Zwalf at the Australian Labor Party National Secretariat, God speed and thank you. To Todd Pinkerton and all his friends in Young Labor, thank you for the service you render to our party without being asked.

I have benefitted from the chance to have my thinking tested by some of the finest minds in this country, people who have indulged me perchance to speak too much and listen too little. I want to thank them. Michael Fullilove at the Lowy Institute, my most patient friend David Hetherington at Per Capita and Michael Cooney at the Chifley Research Centre—thank you. I have been reared in the party with so many people, who are now my great friends. Daniel Kicuroski and Linda Scott—I look up to you both now as much as I did when I was 18. Michael Cominos and Belinda Cominos—the best community organisers I know. I am so grateful to you. Paul Howes—who looked out for me throughout my time in the industrial wing, and is the leader of my generation of union officials most admired—thank you for your friendship. John Whelan and Anil Lambert are the savviest people I know. Thank you for indulging me.

My friends from the National Union of Students—Jodie Jansen, Lambros Tapinos, Laura Fraser Hardy, the Kyriacous/Yorks/Wakes, Sarah Jane Collins, Amber Jacobis and Shannon Fentimen—thank you for yelling at me so constantly: you prepared me so well for this place. I give special congratulations to Shannon, now a Cabinet Minister in a Government as good as Queensland deserves. I have a class of friends who have the right to call me up and tell me I am wrong, at their leisure. Prue Car, I am so happy you were in the class of 2015 and I worry for every Western Sydney member of Parliament from the other parties because you are on the beat—thank you.

Josh McIntosh—so calm, so smart—to you and your partner, Kate Scott Murphy: thank you. Gerard Gilchrist and Elizabeth Scully, the ideal we all aspire to: thank you for your years of friendship. My business partner Tim Chapman and his brother, Ben: thank you for being a delight to work with. Sam Crosby and his wife, Rose Jackson—easily the most charming people I know and the most loyal: your friendship is dear to me, so thank you. Sam Dastyari, a natural Senator and a tremendous friend: to you and to Helen, thank you for your advice, your friendship and your loyalty. Bob Nanva and his wife, Sally Deans—two people who are never too busy to chat because innate to them is the quality of grace—thank you. Nick Lucchinelli is the Luke Skywalker of the Labor movement. He is the one person always capable of returning stability to the force. Thank you. I cannot forget George Simon and Mary Papadopolous. They are easily my most irritating best friends. They are so often right when I am wrong, and they are so often willing to tell me. Never change. Thank you.

I now wish to thank my family. First, I thank the Mehtas, Shankars, Guptas and Kapoors. I spoke at great length at my wedding about how much you all mean to me and my family. My brother spoke at greater length. We stand by all those words. Thank you. To the Mookhy family without an "e"—Ajay, Monica, Uncle, Aunty—and the Sharmas, you have provided to me what no-one else can: the solace of family. Thank you. To my dog, Rumpole, I love you buddy. Now there are at least two people in this place who are looking out for all of our

quadruped brethren. I am proud to say that my first vote in this place was in support of the establishment of an inquiry into puppy farms. To the Cornishes and the Lloyds—my father-in-law Chris, mother-in-law Linley, brothers-in-law Kieran and Aneyrin—I am still on my quest to prove to you all that I am worthy of Tamsin's hand. I hope you think today marks a step forward.

I turn now to my brother, Tarun, and his wife, Sandeep. Everyone needs a big brother. I could not have asked for a kinder, more caring and loving bigger brother than you. Thank you. My sister, Sheena, always said that she would leave the country if I ever entered public life. She left for London three weeks ago. Sheena, I would never tell you this in person but I will put it in *Hansard* for posterity: I miss you and I love you. My mother came to this country to be with her husband. She had three children and I am the youngest. Too quickly, she found herself alone. My late father, may God bless his memory, left us too soon. Mum raised us, educated us and scolded us, but she always loved us, all three of us. She is now our paragon and I hope I can do her proud. Thank you and I love you.

I turn finally to my wife, Tamsin. First, thank you for accepting that this Chamber is not a party conference. You have refrained from heckling me and I owe you for that. I just adore you. I love your kindness, your compassion, your permanent good cheer and the life we have forged together. This is an adventure, but it will not compare to the adventure we are about to have when our little bundle of joy arrives this October. I am so happy because the world needs more people like you.

The causes about which I have spoken matter to me and the people about whom I have spoken are the reason for that. However, it is now my responsibility to avail myself of the privilege afforded me by membership of this Chamber. I will use its power to ensure that more of our citizens have good jobs which have rights attached and which pay well. I will work to ensure that more of our citizens have profitable businesses that support their families, that we all have clean water and clean power and that we are all a little more free. I am honoured to have that chance and I am eager to get started. Mr President, thank you for your indulgence.