



Legislative Council

12/09/84

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS IN REPLY

Extract

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS [4.59]: Mr President, I rise as a newly elected member of this ancient Chamber to congratulate you on your unanimous re-election to your high office of President of the oldest and most venerable House of Parliament in Australia. I offer my sincere congratulations to the Hon. B. J. Unsworth on his election as Leader of the House and the Hon. J. R. Hallam on his appointment as Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. I congratulate the Hon. H. B. French on his election as Government Whip. I thank the Hon. Franca Arena for her kind words of welcome to me on my election to this House. It has been my pleasure to have worked for some years with the Hon. Franca Arena and the Hon. J. Kaldis in a bipartisan way on ethnic issues. I look forward to working with them and all the members of his honourable House to the benefit of the people of this State. I wish to thank all those responsible for supporting my endorsement within the Liberal Party and my subsequent election to this honourable House. In so doing I give my assurance that I shall do my utmost to prove worthy of that great honour. Since my election to Parliament, I have received much personal kindness from you Mr President, from members on both sides of the House, the officers of the Parliament, especially Mr L. A. Jeckin, and the staff of the House. To all I would say thank you.

One cannot stand in the hallowed atmosphere of this ancient Chamber without sensing an aura of history when remembering the giants that bestrode it—men who by their conduct and service gave credence to the role of the second chamber as a bastion of freedom, vigilance and above all courage in our democratic society. And was it not Pericles who some 2 500 years ago said, The secret of liberty is courage.

Indeed it is with feeling that I stand here and recall the election of my great, great grandfather, George Panayotopoulos of Kythera, Greece, to another Legislative Council, that of the Ioanian Islands in 1863—then a protectorate of the United Kingdom. It was, I believe, largely as a result of that historic link between the United Kingdom and the Ioanian Islands that the migration of Greeks to Australia commenced last century.

For almost 200 years this timeless land has been the recipient of migrants from many countries. They and their children have been putting down their roots and in that time been battling nature's hazards; the Great Depression; they have died at Gallipoli, on the Kokoda Trail, in Korea and in Vietnam. Whether in the isolation of the outback, on the turbulent goldfields, in the Snowy Mountains, or in the industrial inner suburbs of our major cities, migrant workers have sweated and toiled relentlessly for a better life and a greater Australia.

When the Commonwealth Government introduced the mass migration policy in 1949, Australia had a population of seven and a quarter million but today, after thirty-five years, Australia has more than doubled the population to reach in excess of 15 million. In so doing, we have noticeably changed the racial composition of our country so that, today, it is believed we have more than 100 ethnic groups, we practice a diversity of acknowledged religions and we speak over 100 languages and dialects daily. Today 20 per cent of our population were born overseas and over half of the population are from non-English speaking backgrounds. It is estimated that they and their offspring born here approximate 3 million. Today, in the words of the late President John F. Kennedy,

We stand on the edge of a new frontier. This growth and development in our country has not been without hardship, tears and suffering, but the wonder of it is that so much was achieved within such a short space of time within the framework of a cohesive, multi-cultural Australian society. I pay tribute to the mass migration policy initiated by the Commonwealth Government in 1948 and I further acknowledge the important and beneficial role of successive Liberal Party-Country Party governments that maximized the migration intake. The following figures from Consolidated statistics of the Department of Immigration show

that the highest intake of permanent settlers to this country occurred under a Liberal Party-Country Party government. In 1968-69 we received 175 657 permanent settlers; in 1969-70 we received 185 099. That was the year that immigration peaked; nearly 200 000 permanent settlers. In 1970-71 the figure dropped back a little to 170 011. I contrast those figures with the figures provided during the Whitlam Labor Government's term of office of 89 147 and again with the Hawke Government's intake for 1982-83 totalling 82 900 and for 1983-84, 74 000.

We can take pride in the historic decision of the Liberal Party-Country Party government in 1976 which led to the entry of some 90 000 Indo-Chinese refugees to this country, who are contributing with distinction and energy to Australians development and welfare. The natural resources of this great continent, both agricultural and mineral, as well as its massive territorial expanse, must needs see the present population of 15 million as a most conservative figure. There is ever a need for a breadth of vision in our decision-makers and community leaders as will ensure that this country's full potential is realized. Whilst there may be coherent and valid reasons for curtailing migration at various stages of our development, we should with tenacity and fierce resolve do our utmost to maintain such maximum levels of migrant intake as we can possibly achieve. The recent CEBA study sponsored by the federal Government over the last three years, initiated when Mr Ian McPhee was the Minister for Immigration and financed by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs and the Committee of the Economic Development of Australia, concludes, according to the *Melbourne Age* of 2nd August, 1984, that faster immigration would not increase unemployment and would have the benefit of reducing the relative burden of welfare spending on the aged. The report further quotes Dr Norman, the project's director and a reader in Economics at Melbourne University, as saying—

Overall immigration continues to exert a generally favourable economic impact in Australia though the magnitude of net economic benefit is probably much less than in the 1950's when vigorous secondary industry growth, more receptive attitudes and the need to fill a population hole created by low birth rates in the 1930's each enabled immigration to contribute more tangibly to the Australian economy than it does apparently today.

The research further indicates that migrants create at least as many jobs as they take up. The recent report of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, according to Michael Lawrence's report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of the 10th September, 1984, shows apprenticeships in skilled trades in Australia were allowed to run down to such an extent in 1982-83 that a higher intake of skilled migrants might be required in the medium term to compensate. The report further states—

Given that a high proportion of recent apprenticeship training effort has been directed to meeting replacement demand requirements rather than any net growth in employment in the trades, it may well be that this reduction in apprenticeship completion levels could lead to supply problems in at least some of the relevant occupational labour markets, making resort to immigration again a necessity.

Indeed, it is generally conceded that there are less than twenty genuine parliamentary democracies in the world today, and we here in the Antipodes are indeed privileged to be a worthy example of one of them—a cultural pluralism within a constitutional monarchical system. And, in this regard, I am mindful of the words of that eminent statement, Edmund Burke, who when speaking 200 years ago on the 16th June, 1784 on the Reform of the Representation of the Commons in Parliament Bill, said:

It is for fear of losing the inestimable treasure we have, that I do not venture to game it out of my hands for the vain hope of improving it. I look with filial reverence on the constitution of my country and never will cut it in pieces and put it into the kettle of any magician in order to boil it, with the puddle of their compounds, into youth and vigour. On the contrary, I will drive away such pretenders; I will nurse its venerable age and with lenient acts extend a parent's breath.

In an age when the world is shrinking and enlightened men are moving closer together in common dialogue through the United Nations and the European Common Market it is a matter of pride that we here in Australia continue to play an important role in a multiracial Commonwealth of independent sovereign States. I believe that all sober thinking Australians are proud to be members of such a Commonwealth, headed symbolically by a Queen who has dedicated her life to her people and the unity of a multicultural Commonwealth of Nations.

Our law courts here in Australia have roots going back 800 years; our very Parliament in New South Wales, the Mother Parliament of Australia, has its roots in a House of Commons some 800 years old, but the monarchical system of which we are a part is over eleven hundred years old. I believe that the cohesion and tradition and stability provided to Australian society by our constitutional monarchy has in no small way been appreciated by newcomers to this country, be they economic or political migrants or refugees. And, as a descendent of a migrant to this country from southern Europe, I place on record my total and unequivocal support for the monarchy.

As Australians and as the only people on this earth to occupy a continent—the fifth continent—we have a special duty to ensure that we honour the heritage that the founding fathers and settlers to this country since 1788 have bequeathed to us, and to continue to ensure that the opportunities and resources of this continent are maximized to the benefit of all Australians, whether newly arrived or born here, and in this regard we must needs remember that the Australian Aborigine has yet to take his rightful place in our society and that the twin scourges of abominable poverty and high unemployment are still with us.

It is true that today the role of this Chamber and its members continues to be challenged by sections of the community. In an age of instant media, it is important therefore that the sterling efforts of members of this Chamber and this House be made known to the public. In this regard, I am persuaded that support should be given to the selective televising of proceedings in the upper House as well as the lower House. Initiatives taken in the Canadian House of Commons in the late 1970's in this regard have indicated very positive results indeed, particularly in relation to the daily question period, which is carried live to major Canadian cities, and the weekly synopsis of parliamentary highlights every Sunday. People ask how it is possible for this State's prime forum of debate to maintain its rightful importance when it is denied access to the nation's prime medium for mass communication. In concluding may we be reminded of the words of a distinguished political architect of the Australian Constitution, Alfred Deakin, who, when speaking in Adelaide in 1898, said:

Awed as I feel by the fact that we come from, that we speak to, and that we act for a great constituency, I am awed by the thought of the constituency which is not visible, but which awaits the results of our labours —we are the trustees for posterity for the unborn millions, unknown and unnumbered—whose aspirations we may help them to fulfil and whose destinies we may assist to determine.

As I look around at members of this House today, who are prominent and senior figures in the professions, commerce, the primary industries, in the trade union movement, and in vital community organizations, I am encouraged to believe in the continued historic and vital role of this Chamber, as trustees of that posterity.