



23/11/2000

Legislative Council
Superannuation Legislation
Amendment (Same Sex Partners) Bill

Hansard
Extract

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO [6.03 p.m.] (Inaugural speech): I support the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Same Sex Partners) Bill. While I am aware that many people in the community have objections, on religious and moral grounds, to the changes in this bill, I do not support discrimination against any section of the community, including gay and lesbian couples. I support social justice and equality. I do not believe that same-sex partners and their dependants should be denied the superannuation entitlements of their deceased partner. I am pleased that the Australian Labor Party [ALP] has introduced this bill to eliminate this area of discrimination.

My commitment to the Australian Labor Party and its principles and objectives goes back many years. I was raised for most of my school years in Cabramatta, where the local area had a strong Labor focus. The Hon. Gough Whitlam was the Federal member and the Hon. Eric Bedford was the State member. Most of my extended family were wage earners who had no reason to support the Liberal Party and who were philosophically opposed to the Democratic Labor Party. When I finished my secondary education I commenced employment in the Commonwealth public service and became active in the Administrative and Clerical Officers Association.

Through my involvement in my union, I met Shane Easson and was encouraged by him to formalise my support for the Labor Party. I first joined the Australian Labor Party in February 1977 at the Enfield Branch, where the Hon. Clive Healy, a former member of this House, was the Branch Secretary and encouraged me in my activism. I became active in New South Wales Young Labor, which I believe is the best political training ground in this country. Skills in public speaking, meeting procedures and tactics become finely honed and are readily translated into many spheres of society and politics. If you can succeed in New South Wales Young Labor, you can succeed in any other forum. Some of my contemporaries in Young Labor who are serving in this Parliament include Dianne Beamer, Carl Scully, John Della Bosca and Sandra Nori. I received guidance and encouragement from the Hon. Dorothy Isaksen, Justice Tricia Kavanagh, Deirdre Grusovin, Graham Richardson and the late Nancy McAloon.

Through my involvement in the ALP I made some very good friends, many of whom remain close friends to this day. I would like to mention Senator Sue West; Councillor Kayee Griffin, who is the Mayor of Canterbury; Kevin Moss, MP; Andrea Stewart; Ursula Stephens; Tony Sheldon and my friends from the Transport Workers Union; Brian Harris and his colleagues at the Municipal Employees Union; and Alastair Macdonald and his colleagues from my union, the Australian Services Union (Clerical and Administrative Branch). As well, I have made many friends and colleagues in the trade union movement who have been most helpful to me over the years. Special thanks must go to Senator Steve Hutchins, who was very generous in his support of my aspirations.

I would particularly like to thank the Hon. Leo McLeay, MP, and the McLeay family, whom I regard as good and close friends. Leo has offered his guidance and support over the years and deserves recognition for being genuine in his commitment to ensuring that women in the ALP are given the opportunity to display their talents and advance their careers. For the last eight years I was afforded the opportunity to work for the New South Wales Branch of the Australian Labor Party. I feel privileged to have worked with so many very dedicated and competent people, in both the political and administrative areas.

Working in the ALP office also allowed me to have regular dealings with the many honorary branch and electorate council officials and committee members who freely give their time and energy to supporting and promoting the party and whose contribution to the party's strength and success deserves recognition and respect. I consider many of the people I have worked with during the last eight years, both paid party

employees and voluntary office holders, to be good friends. Regardless of factional differences, the one unique aspect of the ALP is that in campaigns we all work to achieve a common goal, that is, the election of Labor governments. I hold my former colleagues at the ALP office in high regard and recognise their professionalism in campaigning and their commitment to modernising the New South Wales Branch. I look forward to working with Eric Roozendaal, Mark Arbib and the other officers, officials and staff in future campaigns. I am very happy to see many of my family, friends and colleagues in the gallery today.

One area in which I have had a strong involvement within the party is the issue of affirmative action for women. Back in 1981 when the party decided nationally that affirmative action was to be introduced for internal party positions, I was on a working group, along with the Hon. Jan Burnswoods, which recommended extensive rule changes. I was involved in background work which led to the introduction in 1994 of national rules establishing a quota for the number of women in Parliament.

While Opposition members often make derogatory comments about this quota, I can only draw their attention to the fact that organisations such as the National Farmers Federation have accepted a quota system to ensure minimum levels of representation of women. I enjoyed my time as a member of the Status of Women Committee and the Labor Women's Forum. While there may be some differences of opinion among people within the party about the best way to achieve the required number of women in Parliament, I must say that the commitment to increasing the number of women in Parliament is genuine across all groups in the party, and I look forward to working with more female colleagues in this Chamber and in the other place.

I feel very proud to represent the Australian Labor Party in the New South Wales Parliament as part of the Carr Labor Government. I recognise the contribution of the Hon. Jeff Shaw, whose place in the Chamber I am filling. As I said earlier, I was raised at Cabramatta and for short periods in my younger years lived at Nowra and Taree. Cabramatta was, and remains, a working class suburb with a high proportion of the community coming from a non-English speaking background. Being raised only one block away from the Cabramatta Migrant Hostel and going to local schools with many children who lived at the hostel gave me an understanding of the struggle of newly arrived families and of the hopes and aspirations that they have, particularly for their children. I developed a strong awareness of the social inequities faced by these families and the need to redress these inequities.

The opportunity for access to a quality and affordable secondary and tertiary education allowed many children of migrant families to become successful and raise their standards of living. The policy initiative of the Whitlam Government to provide free university education on the basis of merit rather than the ability to pay allowed many children from migrant and working-class families to go to university and contributed to the development of a truly multicultural society in Australia. Our society, where the sons and daughters of Italian, Ukrainian and Polish migrants could take their place as doctors and solicitors alongside the children of wealthy families from the North Shore and Eastern Suburbs, is much richer than it would have otherwise been.

I made a conscious decision to seek employment in an area in which I could assist people rather than work for organisations which were profit driven. I worked in many areas in the Commonwealth public service which provided direct assistance to individuals through income maintenance programs and in community service programs. Working in the Children's Services Program during the expansion of general child-care services and special services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a non-English speaking background and children with disabilities was very satisfying and enjoyable. The people with whom I worked in the government and community sectors were dedicated and had a strong commitment to the provision of quality services.

Following this I worked in the area of aged persons homes and hostels, which was a challenging area at that time with the issue of residents' rights being implemented. Standards of care were being benchmarked and the concept of home and community care was being introduced. Perhaps one of the most satisfying, yet difficult, challenges I had was implementing the Commonwealth Disability Services Act in New South Wales in 1986. The need to provide more appropriate services, which allow people with disabilities to live as independently as possible and to maximise their abilities, remains a special interest of mine. I have been actively involved on the board of Jobsupport Inc, which is one of the largest and most successful independent supported job services for people with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities in Australia. For this reason I was pleased to be appointed to the Standing Committee on Social Issues.

In my work in these programs I frequently travelled to country areas of New South Wales and consulted with representatives of community organisations who were trying to provide services that were appropriate and would meet the particular needs encountered in country New South Wales. I have a strong commitment to ensuring that there is an equitable distribution of services throughout the State, which is why I am pleased that I have been allocated the responsibility of representing the Australian Labor Party in the electorates of Myall Lakes, Northern Tablelands and Tamworth. I intend to be a frequent visitor to those areas.

I am especially pleased to visit Myall Lakes as both my parents come from that area. My mother, who was a member of the Ramsay family, was raised in Taree, and my father's family come from Tuncurry. In the 1880s my paternal great-grandfather, Vincenzo Fazio, came to Australia from Lipari, which is a small island north of Sicily, and settled in Tuncurry where he established the local fishing industry. He introduced the Mediterranean style of net fishing and sponsored the migration of many other fishermen from Lipari, whose descendants still work in the fishing industry on the mid-north coast and in Sydney Harbour. The old family home in Manning Street is the oldest in situ dwelling in Tuncurry. I have encouraged my children to be aware of their family history and have pride in their forebears.

I enjoy living in Sydney and raising my family here. Like most residents of Sydney, I regard the harbour as the jewel of our city, not just for the sparkling blue waters and green harbourside parks but for the infrastructure on the shores which shows that it has been and still is a working harbour. We should be proud of our maritime history, especially the buildings and structures on Garden Island. Garden Island is one of our most tangible links with the First Fleet, and a naval presence should be retained there. Sydney Harbour should remain a working harbour and not become simply a marina for the pleasure craft of the wealthy to moor outside their harbourside apartments. My aim as a member of the Legislative Council is to help develop and implement policies and legislation which will further the social justice aims of the Australian Labor Party.

I have always believed that the only party that can assist working people and help them to achieve their aspirations is the ALP. The commitment of the ALP to a sense of fair play and the recognition that there are many people in our society who will need to rely on government assistance from time to time is what sets us apart from other parties. The ALP has its origins in the aspirations of the Australian people for a decent, secure, dignified and constructive way of life; the recognition by the trade union movement of the necessity for a political voice to take forward the struggle of the working class against the excesses, injustices and inequalities of capitalism; and the commitment by the Australian people to the creation of an independent, free and enlightened Australia.

At this time, when Federal policies are contributing to a widening of the divide between the rich and poor and when there is a rapid increase in the creation of part-time and casual work, the need to fight for a fair deal for all in our society is great. The erosion of basic services provided by the Federal Government should be condemned. The voluntary sector has already been overburdened by the moves of the Federal Government to divest itself of basic responsibilities. The outsourcing of welfare programs to private enterprise must be resisted. On issues such as these, the myth that there is little difference between the major political parties is well and truly debunked.

A belief in these principles and common objectives is what unites members of the ALP and makes our party so strong. The ALP was founded in 1891 and continues to go from strength to strength. As reports in today's newspapers show, Country Labor is establishing itself as the natural political organisation for people in rural and regional New South Wales. Measures already introduced by the Carr Labor Government, such as the back-to-school allowance and the provision of computers to schools and Internet access for schoolchildren, are helping New South Wales families in need to provide their children with a quality education.

The resources put into those initiatives will pay a dividend for this State in the future as we will have school leavers who are familiar with new technologies and who can take on the challenges that we will face. Recently I represented the Minister for Education and Training at the centenary of Limbri Public School, outside of Tamworth. This small country school had a classroom full of computers that gave the children in this rural community access to information world wide. We should be proud of the commitment of this

Government to provide all children across the State with direct access to those resources.

Finally, I would like to recognise the support and assistance given to me by my family. My parents, Ruth and Vince Fazio, have been very generous in helping me to pursue my political aspirations by caring for my children. They willingly travel from Woy Woy to look after the children when I have to work long hours and late into the night. My children, Alessandro and Angelica, are understanding of the demands on my time and are happy to get involved in campaigning and attending conferences with me. My friend Michael also helps me by shouldering many of the burdens at home. I commend the bill to the House, and thank honourable members for their respectful silence and courtesy to me on this occasion. However, I am a realist and I know that when I next speak in this Chamber I may be subjected to interjections, which, I might add, are often quite amusing.