

INAUGURAL SPEECH

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM (17:32): I want to start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land, the Gadigal clan of the Eora Nation, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. This Parliament is a place steeped in tradition but the history of this land and its people precede it by over 40,000 years. The world's oldest continuing culture is something to be celebrated. I want Australia to come to terms with its past and to reconcile with its first nations through treaty, truth-telling and makarrata. I hope that throughout my time in this place I will be remembered as a friend to Aboriginal Australians and their struggle for self-determination. While we cannot change the past we can chart a different future by acknowledging the past wrongs and by together taking steps to overcome their legacies.

It is a great honour to take a seat in this Parliament and to be given an opportunity to serve the people of New South Wales. I am a student of history. I have loved history since I was a child. I know that our constitutional framework was forged through centuries of struggle. Our democracy and its attendant freedoms are precious. Each generation must seek to deepen and strengthen our democratic institutions. We have a sacred duty to defend these liberties and resist their erosion. Strong institutions are the difference between successful societies and those that fail to deliver the basics to their people. These are the true foundations of our nation's prosperity.

A true democracy not only requires our Parliament to be representative and democratic but also requires our institutions to have democratic values embedded in their frameworks. Our universities, schools, health system, public service, work places and political parties must embody democratic values. Citizens need to be given opportunities actively and meaningfully to participate in the governance of these institutions. And within these institutions there must be space for dissent, disagreement, discussion and debate. I am concerned by the trend toward a decline in party political activism that afflicts our political system. Parties, in particular our relatively stable two-party system, have been the ballast of our democracy but our political system is becoming more fragmented.

I come out of a current in the Left of the Labor Party that holds as fundamental a belief in the sovereignty of the branches and the members. Over the years I have had the benefit of observing many of its key practitioners—Laurie Ferguson, Paul Lynch and Daryl Melham—build and maintain strong branch structures that have sunk deep roots into their communities. It is an approach that is in stark contrast to the prevailing trend in political parties, particularly the Labor Party, where the centralisation of authority has led to a reduction in the influence of ordinary members in the governance of parties. It is a trend that needs to be reversed if Labor is to reconnect to its base. Reform of our political parties as a key institution of our democracy is necessary to ensure that major parties continue to be representative of the broadest cross-section of our society. Our public funding system should ensure that parties are incentivised to maximise citizen participation and adhere to basic democratic norms in their internal governance.

It is a convention in first speeches to commence with an explanation of one's life but, to be honest, I am generally uncomfortable talking about my personal life and background. I think that in society and public life too many people spend too much time talking about themselves. The increasing focus on personal narrative in politics is corrosive. Our politics has become egocentric, leading to increasing presidential tendencies in our political system. This has been to the detriment of the strong Westminster traditions of cabinet government and collective responsibility that have served our nation so well. I believe this flawed emphasis on individual character, which is encouraged by the media industry and social media, is the single greatest contributing factor to the last decade of volatility in our national leadership. Our society has become increasingly self-centred and narcissistic, and this is eroding the basic courtesies, civilities and skills of cooperation that are essential to keeping our society cohesive.

Public discourse has a tendency to overstate the role of individual agency. I have always been a collectivist and have considered the most important factor in sound decision-making is the structure and process for arriving at the decision. In truth few things in the world are achieved through individual

striving. The greatest achievements in political life are achieved collectively. Yet across the globe we can see a misplaced yearning for strong leaders. I subscribe to the view of the legendary civil rights leader Ella Baker, who said that "strong people don't need strong leaders". We as a society need to invest more in ensuring our citizens learn the skills of self-government and collective action.

I am the youngest of five children. I have one brother and three sisters. I was raised a Catholic. I went to Catholic schools and attended mass on a weekly basis. It was often joked in my household that according to Catholic tradition the youngest boy was always destined for the priesthood. I rejected Catholicism in my late teens but around the same time I found a new religion in the cause of Labor and the trade union movement. Although I am no longer a Catholic, it is impossible to avoid the impact of being immersed in a particular culture. My political outlook has been influenced by Catholic social teaching. The centrality of the parable of the good Samaritan, the optional preference for the poor and the concept of subsidiarity, are all foundational elements in my world view.

As I have grown older I have also come to recognise the role of faith in binding and sustaining community, particularly in my own community in western Sydney, where both church and mosque are the gathering points for many new migrant communities. Faith is important in our society and freedom of conscience is the foundation of all other freedoms. This is why I believe the state must be strictly secular. Indeed the only guarantor of the freedom of conscience is a state that remains neutral on matters of religion.

My grandfathers were a significant influence on me despite both having died well before I was born. My siblings had known my grandmothers but both had died by the time I was aware of what grandparents were. I felt a sense of having missed out on something special. It prompted a search for knowledge of who these people were and as I discovered more about them it triggered an interest in politics.

My maternal grandfather, John "Jack" Collins, was also a political activist. A committed Catholic, he was active in the movement. He served in the First World War—a boy when he enlisted in the Light Horse. He was a participant in the charge of Beersheba. He was barely 18 at the time. He hated war and rarely spoke of his war service. He grew up in a working-class family in Newtown. He had little education as a child. He gained his education as an adult, trained as an accountant and went on to rise to a senior level in the Commonwealth Public Service. He was a great admirer of Ben Chifley.

My paternal grandfather, Antonio D'Adam, came to this country in 1922 as a refugee from the rising fascism in his native Italy. He was a socialist, an admirer of Giacomo Matteotti, the Italian socialist leader and martyr. Antonio was involved in a fight with supporters of Mussolini in his home town of Caltrano. He was told they would kill him. He fled his home. He travelled to Genoa and got on the first boat he could. His intention had been to go to America but the ship he obtained passage on was destined for Australia. He never saw his father, his mother or his home country again. Had he arrived today he might have been considered an unauthorised maritime arrival. His story is not dissimilar to so many of my own community in western Sydney who have fled their countries and sought refuge in Australia. Our country must always be a place where those fleeing persecution can find safety and build better lives for themselves and their families.

My father, Bruno, was born in 1933. His early life was shaped by the Great Depression and the war. Growing up as an Italian-Australian when our country was at war with Italy was difficult. Many family friends were interned in prison camps as enemy aliens, irrespective of whether they had opposed the government in Italy. To be Italian in that time was to be the other, to be subject to fear, suspicion and prejudice. When I look at the misplaced hostility that some in our community direct towards Muslims, many of whom have come to Australia fleeing war and oppressive regimes, I think this must have been how Italians felt during the war.

When my father married my mother in the late 1950s it was a little controversial on my mother's side of the family. My mother was from an Anglo-Irish background and by marrying the son of migrants she crossed a type of colour line in place at the time. But their story is part of the great Australian melting

pot. This is the source of the great success of Australia's experience with multiculturalism, as second and third generations of migrants forged new, blended, multicultural identities. When I hear the hand-wringing angst of the ultra Right fretting about the loss of culture, I think: How can they get it so wrong? Culture is dynamic and ever changing, constantly interacting with its environment. So too are identities fluid and shifting. There is no single Australian culture. We are plural and diverse.

I was fortunate to come into the employ of Bob Gould while studying at the University of Sydney. The legendary bookseller took a shine to me and offered me a job at his King Street book shop. Over the course of many nights I was introduced to the canon of the Left. Working at Gould's was my real university education. I discovered writers and ideas that I have continued to draw on. It transformed the way I think and, in particular, I embrace Bob's hostility to authoritarianism. Bob was a Trotskyist for most of his life. He recognised the threat that Stalinism had posed to the viability of a genuine Left. Stalinism was the murderous consequence of the excessive centralisation of power, the erosion of democratic norms and the monopoly of a single dogma in a political system. I have opposed these tendencies wherever I have found them.

Across the globe authoritarianism is on the rise. In Turkey, the Philippines, Russia, Brazil and even in the United States we see attempts to hollow out democracy with electoral manipulation, the erosion of media freedom and the unnecessary centralisation of power in presidential strongmen. In China the Communist Party is forging an alternative model of authoritarian capitalism that poses a challenge to the form of liberal democracy that has prevailed in the West since the Second World War. We take our democratic institutions for granted at our peril.

Stable government, where power alternates through peaceful and democratic elections, is a precious thing. In our own country authoritarian opinion is also on the rise. The increasing appeal of parties of the far Right is disturbing. It reflects a reaction to the expanding arc of freedom in our society. The Right is hostile to those who represent the "other". They reaffirm the dominant view in society. They deliberately ignore historical imbalances in power. They denigrate the struggle of women for social and economic equality. They ridicule the LGBTQTI community. They foment hatred towards Muslims and immigrants.

The authoritarian Right trade in fear and attacking minorities. They use the label "political correctness" to attack ideas of tolerance and pluralism. They claim the mantle of defenders of Western civilisation and the enlightenment, while at the same time they give succour to the anti-science of climate denial. They defend the freedom to say hateful things on the basis of religious freedom but they are silent when a public servant is sacked for tweeting about refugees, or a union worker is sacked for calling someone a scab on a picket line. They yearn for Australia to return to a monoculture. They claim they are outsiders but in truth they are always the voice of the privileged and the powerful. These views cannot go unchallenged. Pluralism and tolerance are at the heart of the success of our multicultural society.

In my late 20s I got a job working with a group training company associated with a forest industry structural adjustment package, working with timber workers who had lost their jobs because of the Carr Government's policy of expanding the national park reserves. Many of these workers faced unemployment for the rest of their lives. They were the collateral damage of decisions made by people in a distant place whom they were never likely to meet. With any significant economic structural change the question is always: Who pays the price? In my experience the poor and the least powerful carry the bulk of the pain. In the timber industry the employers were compensated and they were able to reinvest in different industries. The workers, on the other hand, had more limited options.

The world faces significant environmental challenges in coming years. It is easy to talk about just transitions in this place without having to come face-to-face with the workers and communities that will be left poorer as a result of that change. Labor, as the party of the working class, must learn to reconcile its competing duties to serve its working-class base in the present, and its obligations to future generations to leave them an environment that is fit to live in.

I worked for a number of years for the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union [CFMMEU] in its forestry division. It is an experience that shaped me like no other. It was my first job working for a union and I owe my start there to an amazing trade union leader, Gavin Hillier. He was a working-class man who had risen from the shop floor to take over his union from a tired and lethargic incumbent. He had an innate understanding of politics and had leveraged his union influence to achieve a path-breaking package for workers affected by the then government's forest policy. Gavin was a believer in the power of education. He believed anyone could do anything with the right training. His faith in the human capacity to learn has left its mark on me, which I hope to translate into my approach to policy problems in this place.

My work for the union took me to many parts of rural and regional New South Wales. I was a young man who had spent my entire life in the city. I had lived a sheltered life. I remember travelling to the North Coast one day to assist a mill worker who had been unfairly dismissed. He had been injured at work and was suffering from poor health. His employer had dismissed him for excessive absenteeism. I had arranged to meet the affected member at his home to discuss the proceedings, scheduled for the following day. I arrived to discover his home was a caravan in a caravan park. It was not the kind of place where people took holidays. When I entered his home I discovered that he was living with his wife and three children in this tiny caravan. It was poverty the likes of which I had never encountered before and it shocked me that this was possible in a country as wealthy as ours. Some of the poorest electorates in this State are located in rural areas. Whilst in this place I want to find solutions to rural poverty. I would hope that, on this issue, common cause could be found with those on the other side of the Chamber.

Our society remains an unequal one. We have become afraid to talk about class. Labor is about ending class distinction in society. But those on the top of the class system do not want to talk about class. They want to pretend that class does not matter. Some in our society do not want to admit that there are deep-seated structural inequalities embedded in our society. When Labor talks about these inequalities our opponents say we are engaging in class war. But how can we solve a problem if we are denied the language to describe it, to analyse it? I want to bring a class perspective to policy debates in this place, to ask: What are the implications of any initiative in changing the balance of class power in society? It is not class war. It is just the unending struggle for justice in a society blighted by inequalities of wealth, power and opportunity.

Some in my party might be prepared to raise the white flag in this so-called class war but I am not content to surrender—at least not until Indigenous Australians live lives as long as non-Indigenous Australians; not until workers enjoy safe, fair and equal treatment in the workplace; not until the poor can get their teeth treated without having to go on a waiting list; and not until our disadvantaged public schools get funding to equalise the ledger of opportunity.

For 17 years I worked for the New South Wales Public Service Association [PSA]. It is an extraordinary union with a rich history. It is the union that represents this State's public servants. We are lucky in this State to have such a fine public service. It continues to be a fine service despite the best attempts by the Government to erode its capacity and sap its morale with constant cuts. Staff cuts have facilitated a hollowing out of the expertise of the sector and a greater reliance on contractors and the major consulting firms. These firms bring to the policy process advice tainted by their ongoing commercial interests.

I am for a permanent, professional and independent public service capable of delivering frank and fearless advice in the Westminster tradition. There is a saying that to a person with a hammer every problem looks like a nail. That is the modern Liberal Party with its fetish for market-based solutions. It is why it is obsessed with privatisation. I am sceptical of market-based solutions to public policy problems. Governments must always be conducted in the public interest. The difficulty with private sector involvement in the provision of public services is that private corporations are structured to serve both private interests first. Inevitably there is a conflict of interest and these conflicts are often resolved out of the public view.

In my time at the PSA I worked closely with our prison officers during the Legislative Council inquiry into the proposal to privatise prisons. During the course of that process I was convinced that some functions of government should never be ceded to the private sector and incarceration is one of them. Incarceration is a necessary evil. In a liberal democracy the denial of a person's liberty must always be the last resort. We need to make sure the incentives in our system are structured to try to reduce the number of people in our jails. In the United States we have seen what can go wrong when for-profit companies have an interest in subverting the justice system. I want to see all our correctional centres returned to direct public ownership and control.

I am a supporter of federalism and oppose the trend towards a more centralised form of government with most power and functions vested in the Commonwealth. Government services are best delivered closest to the people and by a level of government that can be easily accessed by its citizens. I believe State government is also the level of government best placed to innovate. Many landmark achievements were first legislated at a State level, such as annual leave and anti-discrimination legislation.

I am a unionist. I have worked for three unions and each has expanded my perspective on different sectors of the economy. My period of service in the union movement has occurred at a time of great change and challenge. As unions have grappled with a period of decline there has been considerable thought invested in the reinvigoration of the tradition of organising. The core dilemma of the organiser is how to engage workers to take action. An organiser sets about solving this dilemma through identifying and nurturing organic leadership. The organising tradition provides fertile ground for a rethinking about how we engage citizens in society. It is a process that is central to much of the community engagement work undertaken by various levels of government. In public health, in education, in emergency management and in sport development we know that stronger community engagement leads to better outcomes for communities.

In my preparation for this speech I have read many of the inaugural speeches of members in this place. I was shocked by the number of members from the Liberal Party who identified a hostility to unions as a formative part of their world view. Hating unions seems to be an article of faith in the Liberal Party. It seems that those opposite will not be content until workers are left with no voice to speak for their interest. George Meany once said that the only voice is the organised voice. Who will speak for workers if the Liberals succeed in finishing off the union movement? Worker voice is a public good. Unions are a public good. They are essential to bringing fairness to workplaces.

Frederick Douglass said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." Employers have no incentive to pay their workers more. A dollar in the worker's pocket is a dollar out of the employer's pocket. Power in the workplace is always asymmetric. The employer always has the whip hand. Sometimes workers can combine and force an employer to do something that they are not inclined to do. But this is a rarity. How can we have a balanced and fair society if the other side of politics continues to use State power to attack unions?

I am a believer in direct action unionism. I believe workers should be empowered to solve issues themselves at the workplace together. It is a simple concept; the right to refuse to do something at work because it is unsafe or it is unfair. It is a basic human right. It is a check on the arbitrary exercise of power in the workplace and the preservation of that right is fundamental to ensuring that the rights of people prevail over the rights of property. I want to pay tribute to the CFMMEU as the union has been made a target of the conservative forces in this country because this union refuses to surrender this very basic right.

Politics is a collective endeavour. Many people have contributed to the process of bringing me to this place. In my political activism I have been sustained by my family, friends and comrades. That support has been political, emotional and intellectual. I would firstly like to thank my comrade, formerly of this place and now in the other place, the formerly "the Hon." Lynda Voltz, MP. I am confident she will be "the Hon." again in the future. Lynda is a lion of the Left, a fierce advocate for social justice. She will leave her mark in the Legislative Assembly as she has in this House. She has been a great support to me and I look forward to continuing to work with her in the future.

I thank Laurie Ferguson. There is no greater practitioner of community engagement in this State than Laurie. Over many years I have watched and learned from Laurie what real constituency work looks like. I also acknowledge Maurie Campbell, who for many years worked with Laurie. No-one is more formidable in the hand-to-hand combat of Labor Party credentialing than Maurie Campbell. I thank Andrew Ferguson, who gave me support at critical junctures on my journey here. He has always believed in me and helped me when I needed it. I thank Rita Malia and Darren Greenfield from the CFMMEU, Construction Division, for their support. I am so proud to have an ongoing association with this great union.

I acknowledge Daryl Melham and Paul Lynch, MP, both strong advocates of a party that is firmly grounded in its rank and file. I acknowledge Rodney Cavalier, who carries the torch for the "party below" and who has taught me through his columns in the *Southern Highland Newsletter*, and sometime conversations on the fringes of conferences, what good government should look like and what the Labor project should be. I thank my friends and comrades from the Sydney University Labor Club. I met a lot of smart and passionate people in my time there. What started as political friendships have evolved into so much more as we have gotten older. To Rose Tracey, Verity Firth, Alice Murphy, Julia Finn, John Graham, Jenny McAllister, Maya Stuart-Fox, Tim Ayres, James Carleton, Anastasia Polities, Andrew West, Phil Davey, Emma Maiden and Chris Siorokos, thank you.

Thank you to my Labor Party friends and supporters in my local area, particularly Barbara Dundas, Robert Jones, Fahad Mahmood, Michael Spicer, Caroline Staples, Martin Byrne, Ali Ulutas and Councillor George Campbell. I pay special tribute to my friend and comrade Vince Roach, who died earlier this year. He was a tireless worker for the party in my area and I had hoped he would be here to help me, as there is so much more to do. I thank the former member for Auburn, Barbara Perry, and her husband, Michael, for their friendship over the years and for all the work they have done for our community.

To my friends from my time at the PSA—particularly Jessica D'Arienzo, Valerie Morales, Aaron Jones, Steph Cunio, Steve Turner, Maria Cirillo, Andrew Holland, James Shaw, Thane Pearce and Alex Grayson—thank you. I also take this opportunity to recognise the work of the parliamentary staff, particularly all the PSA members in the Parliament. To all my comrades from the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance [MEAA] who made my time there so rewarding, thank you. I make a special shout-out to the MEAA members in Hansard.

Thank you to my family, my brother, Paul, and my sisters, Catherine, Genevieve—who I understand is watching today from Corfu; it is nice for some!—and Johanna, and my mum and dad, Maureen and Bruno D'Adam. I hope I can do you proud. I have had a fortunate and happy life largely thanks to your efforts and sacrifice. I love you all. To Kelly's family, my mother-in-law, Elizabeth, Kelly's sister, Sian, her husband, Kendal, and their daughter, Lily, you have been a great support to Kel and me over the years. To my children, Samuel, Atticus and Inez, I love you more than words can express. To my darling Kel, no person has had a greater influence on my politics than you. Kel is a feminist, a political activist, a trade unionist. She knows the personal is political. She has taught me how to live according to our values. Every day she gives her all for public education. You are my best friend and comrade. Thank you for your love and support.