

## Legislative Council Hansard – 05 June 2019 – Proof

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**

**The PRESIDENT:** I remind honourable members that this is the member's first speech and she should be given all due consideration. Before the honourable member starts, I welcome into my gallery members of the Hon. Rose Jackson's family, including her husband, Sam Crosby, their children, Oscar and Charlotte, her father, Mr Martin Butler, her mother-in-law, Mrs Bronwyn Crosby, and her brother, Joe. I also welcome into the public gallery the Hon. Chris Bowen, member for McMahon in the Australian Parliament. I welcome you all in the House this evening for the member's first speech.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON (18:01):** The land we are on is called Eora. The first people here were the Gadigal. In 1909 this Parliament passed the Aborigines Protection Act, which gave legal force to the Aborigines Welfare Board and its wide-ranging control over the lives of Aboriginal people. In doing so, it introduced one of the deepest sources of our national shame by codifying the board's power to remove Aboriginal children from their families. I acknowledge the Gadigal today in this place not as a mere hat tip or commonplace convention but in solemn acknowledgement that the laws that gave the New South Wales Government power to steal the children of Aboriginal families, to take the babies from their mummies, were laws that were made in this very room, in this Parliament House, by our predecessors. The lives and resilience of the Gadigal should serve to inspire and humble us. They should stand as a profound warning: What we do here matters.

Having said that, I am aware of how disconnected ordinary people are from politics, from government. Their apathy and cynicism is a disaster to someone like me, who believes politics is essential to building a better world. I do not submit to the idea that politics is immaterial or irrelevant. I do accept, however, that we have to do things differently. So much of that alienation of people from politics we have brought on ourselves. The funny language that we use here—going on about "this place" and "the other place", "honourable this" and "mister that"—so much of the work of people in politics is circumscribed and aloof. I do not reject tradition, but I do not subscribe to it at the expense of engaging with the community. We should think through the traditions of this place, those that serve a purpose and those that are unnecessary and confusing.

The digital revolution has profoundly changed how much information and interaction community members have with political leaders. That so few people seem particularly interested in interacting with us is deeply sobering. The answer is not as simple as #legislativecouncil or live tweeting debates. Turning apathy into enthusiasm, converting cynicism into hope, is not going to be done with one speech, one motion or one Act of Parliament. We have to do a lot of things differently for a long time. This is the job of all of us. As much I can, I will do my bit. I will work with pretty much anyone who shares that enthusiasm and that hope. I am not pretending we can get on all of the time, but we do need dedication, dogged determination, to find common ground. It is going to take consistent engagement by determined people to show up, listen, be honest, talk with no bullshit or spin, make fewer promises and keep more of them.

I want to define my service to the people of New South Wales by three principles: fragility, fearlessness and fraternity. When I speak of fragility I do not mean weakness. I mean vulnerability and openness. Saul Alinsky said, "The human spirit glows from that inner light of doubt about whether we are right. Those who believe with complete certainty they know the answer are dark inside and darken the outside world with cruelty and injustice." I reject dogma; I embrace doubt. More and more, when politicians make laws for people, we are asking them to show us their true selves—at inquiries and committees, with personal testimony, individual experience. If politicians cannot be open to each other, we live closed, narrow lives. I do not want to live like that and I do not want to legislate like that. Which is just as well, because I have already been publicly humiliated on the front page of a national newspaper. I have already publicly humiliated myself on live national TV. I swear, I get things wrong, I stuff things up. None of these things define me, but I do not deny them. These experiences explain who I am as much as any university degree or childhood anecdote.

One of the reasons I can look at the positive side of my many failings is because of my wonderful friends who have been a source of what strength I have. My treasured bestie, Jo Haylen, and life coach, Garth Williams: thank you for the lifetime of memories and so many more to come. My partner in fighting crime, George Simon, and his beautiful wife, Mary: George, you saw me at my lowest and you said to me, "You have 15 minutes to pull it together," you gave me a hug and I did. The National Organisation of Labor Students crew: Tamsin Lloyd, Daniel Mookhey—except you were in Student Unity; shame!—Angus McFarland, Dan Doran, Asren Pugh, Tim and Ben Chapman and Joy Kyriacou. NOLS presidents forever. Prue Car, Katie Ford and Peter Bentley, Chris Gambian and Kate Lee, Amit Singh and Rowena O'Neill: thanks for all the chats and the wines.

Thank you to my husband, Sam Crosby—he is not here yet. Sydney trains—let's fix them! I know what hard work looks like because of you. We are such a wonderful team. You are such a wonderful father. Our beloved children, Charlotte and Oscar, are most precious to me. They are my corner pieces. The puzzle of life and love and loss is manageable because I have them. Thanks also to Sam's family—Michael and Bronwyn, Huw, Ted and Nerida—without whom we would be slovenly unfed human bin-fires. Thank you to my dad, Martin, and my brother, Joe. I know what selflessness looks like because of you. You give so much of yourselves to others. I have sand and salt water in my veins from our endless summers in Bondi. Our family is smaller now, a tight unit, but unbreakable.

To be fragile, to have doubt, to embrace uncertainty and still to be effective, you must be fearless. Hesitation can hold you back, but fearlessness allows you to proceed even when you are unsure. Fearlessness is not being foolhardy or pretending you are not scared. It means that you know something is scary but you believe it is important enough to do it anyway. My mum taught me to be fearless. Facing fear, not running from it. She faced down prime ministers and war lords, she reported from the front lines of wars in Somalia, Iraq and East Timor. Here they are! I thanked you already. Thank you!

My mum took her diagnosis of Parkinson's disease in her stride, documenting the extreme pain and vulnerability of her disease in a way that gave dignity to so many. She died as she lived: Refusing to submit, exploring the world, fearless in the face of failing limbs, debilitating panic attacks and constant pain. I have carried my mum out of a public toilet because she was too paralysed by panic to move. I have crouched on all fours over a newborn baby, trying to breastfeed a mastitis out of an aching boob while on a teleconference.

I have been the only voice in a room putting a contrary view. This does not make me special or any better or worse than anyone else in Parliament or the community. I do not ask for sympathy because my mum died or I have struggled to balance working and being a parent, or because I had to chart my own path as a young woman through the NSW Labor machine. I am not looking for pity or judgement. I am just seeking an honest connection. These things are part of who I am. I put them on the record because the thing I do fear is that in this Parliament I will lose touch with myself. You see it happen. Over time good people become disconnected from the communities who have supported them. The rot of apathy sets in, our rough edges and characters are rounded out by concession and convention.

I call on all those who have supported me into this Parliament to hold me to account. Central among those are the union movement. Thank you Mel Gatfield and United Voice, my union. At United Voice I worked with cleaners from migrant backgrounds who emptied bins and cleaned the toilets in places like Parliament House. I worked with early childhood educators who love and cultivate our children—my children. I have worked with home carers who wash and care for our elderly and disabled. These wonderful people—mainly women—are generally paid \$18, \$19 or \$20 an hour. We do not value the work of these people even closely commensurate with their actual importance to society, or even roughly equivalent to their dignity or self-worth. How do they win fair pay? How do they secure safe workplaces? Who stands up for them when they have been sacked because they are pregnant? Who believes them when a colleague bullies or harasses them?

Unions do all those things. They do those—and more—every day. They are a source of individual comfort, collective power and social good. They promote economic growth. Even the International Monetary Fund, which is hardly some organisation captured by left-wing group-think, has recognised the direct correlation between union strength and economic growth. I thank Melissa Donnelly and the CPSU, Natalie Lang and the ASU, Rebecca Reilly and the FSU, Steve Murphy and the AMWU, Grahame Kelly and Shane Thompson from the miners, Patricia Fernandez from the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union, and Rita Mallia and the CFMMEU. In the spirit of fraternity, I thank Dan and Misha from the AWU, Tony and the team at the TWU, Bob Nanva and Mark Morey. You have supported me. I am enthusiastic about the opportunity to support you.

Fraternity is more than a great virtue. It is a great method. When you want to serve in the interests of the great mass of the people, then you know we are stronger together. It is as simple as that. You are a stalwart from a right-wing Labor union who wants to see good secure jobs for the future—give me your hand, brother. You are a left-wing feminist sister who wants to dismantle the patriarchy so women can get equal pay—sign me up. You are a Catholic from the suburbs concerned about loneliness, social isolation and the fracturing of community connections—I am right there with you. You are a mum from the north shore who cannot find or afford decent child care—I hear you. You are a dad from the shire, sick of sitting in traffic or on an overcrowded train—over here, buddy. You are from farming communities who care about the climate emergency that is devastating our rivers and livelihoods or you are regional parents who are angry and distressed that your gay son is being bullied at school and nothing is being done—how can we help? You are city workers who care about your kids owning their own home and healthy farmland to grow our food—how can we find a way?

I will work with pretty much anyone who has enthusiasm and hope. My days as an active participant in organisational contest within NSW Labor are over, thankfully. But I will always be a leftie. When you are in the Left you are in the Left all the way from your first failed student protest to your last dying day. I do thank my friends in the NSW Labor Party office. I learnt so much there about who I am, about what I stand for and about how to conduct myself. I particularly want to thank Dom Ofner and his lovely partner, Phoebe. Dom kept me mostly sane in the madhouse. Or maybe we were the mad ones? And I thank Mark Boyd, as well as Georgia Kriz, Zack Solomon and the delightful and loyal Oliver Plunkett. I also have to thank Tim Gartrell, who honestly is probably my favourite person in NSW Labor—and that of course is saying something because my husband is also in NSW Labor. But Tim you are generous, classy and kind-hearted, and I wish you and Anthony all the very best taking on the Tories in Canberra.

Meredith Burgmann, who is a former President of this Council, showed me the awesome power of women's leadership and not giving a crap about what people think about you. She took a chance on an overly enthusiastic law student and set me on my way. Verity Firth, Carmel Tebbutt, Tanya Plibersek, Jenny McAllister and Linda Burney have steered me. Not all labels sit comfortably upon me. Feminist is one I proudly embrace. I am a feminist because if I have worked as hard, been as smart, contributed as much as any bloke, the fact that I am a woman should not hold me back. In Labor, we are getting there. Young women in NSW Labor know that if you are good enough, you will get a go. They see it in so many inspiring sisters that Labor puts forward. In society, not so much.

Our society is still patriarchal. Men continue to enjoy advantage and preferment not because they are better or even necessarily any good at all, but because they are men. What a load of rubbish. Patriarchy, it's time to get in the bin. Labor titans like Bruce Childs, John Faulkner, Anthony Albanese, Damian O'Connor, Luke Foley and especially my colleague John Graham taught me about resilience, fortitude and the power of being principled. Thanks also to Chris Bowen and John Watkins whose wisdom has been, and remains, invaluable.

I have spoken of fearlessness and fraternity, of generating enthusiasm and building hope. Doing this requires us to break the cycle of apathy, low expectations and disappointment. I want to step up when others are stepping back. I want to offer support for people and issues even when what they are asking for is difficult, or big, or out of fashion. I want to help the real quiet Australians, the people no-one is interested in talking to who are living lives no-one is interested in talking about. I want to be a voice for prisoners, for drug users, for the unemployed, for the long-term homeless, for the poor—the desperately poor.

It seems it has become politically acceptable to talk about people who have lots of things and fear losing some of them, but not about people who have nothing—who have nothing to lose. Talking about a more equal society is not mistaken or foolish. I do not want rich people to be poor. I do not want some grey levelling of everyone. I am not interested in pretending that we can just pull a few policy levers and make everyone's material circumstances identical. But I am also not particularly worried that this is about to happen. I also do not want poor people to be poor and to live in poverty and in the real actual world this is where we have work to do. When the State has so much money. "Quarter of a trillion dollars", they say over and over again. I am reminded that, yes, we are so well off and yet, despite that, so many live difficult and desperate lives. This is not something I would be boasting about. A more equal society is a better society, a safer society, a happier society, a healthier society. A more equal society is the core of Labor's mission. It is the core of my mission. I will not give up on this aspiration.

I have other aspirations for a better world. Climate change is an emergency that demands our immediate attention. Its impact will be catastrophic. So much of the effective global action on climate change has been initiated at the State or local level. Why can't New South Wales be a global leader in taking action on climate change—the global leader again? I say "again" because of course we were the first jurisdiction in the world to enact an emissions trading scheme. We should set a renewable energy target in this State. The Government should fund and build renewable energy infrastructure. These things should happen urgently. Also remember that it was this Parliament that first trialled the medically supervised injecting centre. We should be world leaders in this area again. Marijuana should be legal. You cannot believe alcohol and cigarettes should be legal and not marijuana. There is no evidence to suggest it is more dangerous or addictive than those other substances.

Unless the Government's next step in its wowsler war on fun—following its highly successful assault on Sydney's nightlife and international reputation—is the criminalisation of cigarettes and alcohol then we should listen to the evidence that is overwhelming and legalise marijuana in New South Wales. We should also trial pill testing. Young people are dying. If we can help prevent these deaths we should listen to the experts and the evidence and establish a medically supervised trial of pill testing for the 2019-2020 summer festival season. Abortion should be legal. Every day women, their families and their doctors are making the difficult decision to terminate a pregnancy. Criminalising abortion does not stop abortion: It just makes abortions less safe and stigmatises women and their bodies. That has to change.

Mr President, through you, I want to address my Labor mates. My colleagues sitting here in the Council, my friends watching in the gallery, my comrades organising in a workplace tonight—everyone who supported me, everyone who got me here: The uncertainty NSW Labor people face in 2019 is scary because we feel like we do not have a stable and settled understanding of what has gone wrong. We need to embrace this groundlessness. We need to see the incredible beauty and opportunity in moments of political chaos. We do win elections and when we do we move the place forward faster than our opponents can drag it back when they get in. That is why this country is worth loving and living in. That is what we do. I do not know what the future holds. I am a deeply rational person. I do not believe anyone or anything knows what the future holds. Will Labor win again? Will our ideas win again? When will this happen? How do we make this happen? How do we make this happen soon?

I will not stand here and pretend to know everything that has gone wrong and articulate a detailed roadmap to a better place. There is no clever plan, no crafty trick, no strategic masterstroke. Even if I could, I am not sure I would lay out such a masterplan. I am a bit over believing in heroes and messiahs. I am sick of people who think they know everything and waste our time by telling it to us, at great length and with great importance, only for it to be wrong, again. The only chance we have got, the best hope we have, is each other, our team, our tribe, our best collective selves—not in an insular or exclusive way. No, I cast this in the broadest possible terms, but it is a collective effort.

Yes, we are vulnerable, yes, we feel fear, but no, we are never alone as we struggle to grasp our best selves. We push into the darkness together and through it see the light. The Carthaginian General Hannibal declared, "We will either find a way, or make one." This is true. We will find a way back to government, to a better society, to a more equal society. If we try and we find none presently exists, we will make a new one. We will do these things together. Labor is not just a cause for power. Labor is a force for change. We must not wait for another moment; the moment is now. Enough talk. Let's begin.

**The PRESIDENT:** I shall now leave the chair. The House will resume at 8.00 p.m.