

INAUGURAL SPEECH OF DR JOHN KAYE

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The PRESIDENT: Order! I call Dr John Kaye. I remind all honourable members and those who are present in the gallery that it is customary to hear a member's first speech in silence. I ask all members and people in the gallery to extend that courtesy to Dr Kaye this evening.

Dr JOHN KAYE [5.36 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): As a matter of protocol, and also as a mark of respect, I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional owners of the land on which this Parliament sits. I pay my respects to the elders, past and present. I also pay my respects to those who, 40 years ago, struggled for and achieved constitutional recognition for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their rights to at least be counted as part of the census. Their success sits proudly in the great Australian history of struggle—a history of social justice activists, unionists, environmentalists and a stirrers, people who created a powerful tradition of taking the notion that it does not have to be this way and translating it into action. That tradition even to this day says that working people deserve a fair share of this nation's wealth, that corporations should not be allowed to ravage our environment, and that economic disadvantage should neither be punished by impoverishment nor allowed to become an inherited condition.

Emblematic of the men and women who created that tradition is Jack Munday. His vision forged new connections between creating a more just and equitable society and protecting the environment. His work gave name and direction to a movement that grew from green bans to the Greens party. It is this tradition that those great people created that the Greens are today committed to making a living reality, both in this Parliament and on the streets.

Now, more than ever before, we need that tradition. For the first time in human history the tragedy of the commons—the overexploitation of that which is publicly held—now threatens the very existence of civilisation. We are in the first decade of the greenhouse century. For at least the next 100 years, if not longer, every decision, every choice and every consequence will be tempered by our impact on the climate, and its impact on us. We cannot duck this reality with the blind faith that we will be rescued by some yet-to-be-proven technology, such as so-called clean coal or supposedly safe nuclear power. They simply may never work. Even if they do, they will be available far too late to avoid disastrous consequences for the climate.

Pretending that we do not have a problem might well help the coal corporations to continue to make massive profits. Making token gestures to renewable energy while continuing with business as usual might help big parties win elections, but there is now only one way that we can respect our obligations to the future and that is to recognise that the era of carbon-based fuel dependency sooner or later must come to an end.

This State faces two distinct choices: we can either work together and prepare for a future that takes us beyond fossil fuels, or we can put our heads in the sand and hope that something will turn up. If we ignore the warnings we are risking economic and environmental devastation. It is highly likely that some time in the next 15 years other countries will say to Australia, "We do not want your coal any more." While Australia has been concentrating on developing ever cheaper and more efficient ways to extract coal, other countries have been putting their productive efforts into developing post-carbon technologies such as renewables and energy efficiency. Worse still, at the time the international community is bound to turn to Australia and say, "By the way, you can no longer continue to be the world's leading greenhouse polluters. You have to reduce your per capita emissions to world standards." At that time Australia will hit a brick wall, economically and environmentally. We will be backed into a dead end by our lack of foresight and our refusal to face the realities of the climate contributions of fossil fuels. When that happens the current year 7 students will have just begun their adult lives, only to be confronted by an economy devastated by the need to respond quickly to the effects of greenhouse gas emissions, and a planet that is in ruins. The Greens believe that we can offer those young adults

an alternative future.

If we tackle the root causes of greenhouse gas emissions head on by winding back the State's economic and technical dependency on coal, and if we plan for a post-carbon future rather than having it thrust on us, we can make good choices. We can create a vibrant renewable energy industry, bringing with it quality employment, a reliable electricity supply and a good measure of prosperity. However, that can happen only if we start now—by rejecting new coal-fired power stations and new coalmines, by insisting on world-leading energy efficiency standards and by pushing the envelope on what we can achieve with renewable energy.

We Greens tell this same narrative over and over; it inspires fear and it inspires optimism, but mostly it is designed to inspire action. It also contains many important political lessons. The message is important, because reducing greenhouse gas emissions to sustainable levels is not the only imperative of this, the greenhouse century.

Somehow we are going to have to learn to survive the end of the availability of cheap and plentiful liquid fuels as our petroleum supplies will inevitably run out.

We must reverse the trends towards greater social, ethnic and economic divisions not only in Australia but globally. We have to undo the growth in inequality of economic outcomes. We have to stop the headlong rush to extinction that faces so many species on this wonderful little planet. And to hold it all together we need a healthy democracy that withstands the social stresses that will be brought on by a changing climate and an ageing population.

The first lesson is the need for evidence-based reasoning that rejects prejudice and sectional interest. Reality is closing in on us fast and we need to deal with it on its terms. We have to surrender the luxury of allowing prejudice, greed and ignorance to infect debates and decision making, not just within this Parliament but throughout society.

Those prejudices seek to undo the benefits of the Enlightenment. We cannot listen to those who say that their religious beliefs justify vilification of gays and lesbians or people of different religions or ethnic backgrounds. Neither should we take seriously those who, either in ignorance or wilfully, misconstrue the scientific process and findings on climate change to say that we do not need to act to reduce emissions. Let us be completely clear about this. Climate change science is not a conspiracy of self-interested scientists. When scientists say, "There is strong evidence that increasing carbon dioxide levels will lead to dangerous climate change" it is not an invitation to scepticism but an honest expression of the openness of the scientific process to admit new evidence.

The second lesson is the need to reinvent our belief in the concept of "public". As individuals none of us has the capacity to meet these challenges successfully on our own, but they are soluble only if we reinvigorate the public institutions that allow us to work together collectively for the common good. Those challenges require collective solutions, which cannot be produced by corporate boardrooms, markets, consumer choice and greed acting alone.

Our great public school system and TAFE colleges knock some of the rough edges off socioeconomic disadvantage and create a celebration of diversity. More importantly, they are central to a culturally, economically and politically successful society that can innovate and thrive in the greenhouse century.

The public ownership of utilities such as water, electricity and transport creates the possibility that they can respond to community needs, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Privatised electricity or water retailers are shackled to the need to maximise profit. They can never work in partnership with energy and water consumers to reduce demand in a way that a well-managed and well-led public owned utility can.

But the Greens' vision of public goes beyond education, utilities and services such as transport, health and broadcasting. The Greens' vision includes the belief that as a community we have a collective right to determine our common future. That is why we have so vigorously opposed John Howard's WorkChoices legislation that seeks to destroy unions and leave all workers isolated and at the mercy of their employer.

And that is why the Greens continue to push for a State industry policy, a policy that says it is our right as a society to have an opinion on what should be manufactured and where it should be manufactured. In this way we can collectively reverse the economic decline of small rural communities. We can ensure that Australia becomes a world leader in renewable energy and energy efficiency. That will secure a high employment future for this State based on satisfying our needs and playing into a burgeoning export market.

Yet all of these ideas of the public are under attack—from the fundamentalism that regulation is always less effective than market forces; from the self-serving notion that cooperation has been superseded by greed; and from the entirely false ideology that public is inferior to private.

Nowhere is that more obvious and more damaging than in education. I am yet to meet a politician who will openly say that he or she wants to destroy the public education system and replace it with a system of private schools. But that is exactly what every politician does when he or she sits back and allows the funding of private schools to increase dramatically at the expense of public education: they are handing over the education future of this country to the ideals of consumer choice and market. They are selling out on the idea that we collectively have responsibility for the future of our children. If there is one achievement that I would like to meet on behalf of the Greens in this Chamber over the next eight years it would be to keep alive the debate over the funding of private schools and the idea that public education must be the first and foremost responsibility of every level of government, as it is written in the Education Act. It is not only the idea of public that we need to reinvent but politics itself. We are ill-served in this greenhouse century by a political culture that appears to most people to be little more than a game of football between two sides, scoring points at each other's expense to win the premiership and govern for four years. The challenges we face are too complex to be resolved by simple right and wrong answers. Added to that mix is the malign influence of political donations from developers, the tobacco and alcohol industries, pharmaceutical companies, defence contractors, banks and other corporations seeking to buy legislative outcomes that sacrifice the public interest in their quest to maximise their profits.

For the Greens, politics can be so much more, and it really has to be so much more if we are to address those challenges. Proportional representation is an important first step so that we bring to each debate a real reflection of the range of opinions in our society— For the Greens, politics can be so much more, and it really has to be so much more if we are to address those challenges. Proportional representation is an important first step so that we bring to each debate a real reflection of the range of opinions in our society—as we saw this evening in the adjournment debate. It is only by bringing a range of opinions on to one table that we can produce answers that are closer to forming a complete social consensus.

But politics is much more than just parliament; it is about how people think of themselves and their community and the possibilities for making life much better. Creating a real democracy is about engaging everyone in determining the future. It is about making sure that wealth and cultural resources do not buy power over those who have much less of each.

The next eight years will be challenging. They will demand of all of us, parliamentarians and community members alike, sophisticated thinking about where we go next and how we negotiate these challenges. I have the advantage of belonging to a movement, a party, a group of friends and a family that provide a very broad set of shoulders to stand on. My colleagues Ian Cohen, Lee Rhiannon and Sylvia Hale, and Kerry Nettle and her colleagues in the Senate have forged new paths in Australian politics. It is my privilege to travel with them along those paths.

I am here because a lot of Greens candidates, campaigners, members and supporters worked very hard, sometimes under highly adverse circumstances. I hope that at the end of eight years they can take some pride in the work we have done together collectively. My friends in the Greens and elsewhere have rubbed some of the rough edges off me but, as you have probably already observed, not all of them. They are a constant source of inspiration and ideas.

My mother and my father are watching over the Internet, as they have always watched over me and guided me throughout my life. They set the standards and all that their four children had to do was follow in their unique ways. My parents, my two brothers, my sister, and their partners and offspring are great supporters.

My partner, Lynne Joslyn, is not only a brilliant public sector teacher, but also finds the time and energy to be my best friend. She is the most patient, tolerant and selfless person I have ever met. I fear at times that she really needs to be.

To all of you I say thank you, and welcome to our journey together.

Question—That this House do now adjourn—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 5.52 p.m. until Thursday 1 June 2007 at 11.00 a.m.
