

INAUGURAL SPEECH OF THE HONOURABLE LUKE FOLEY

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The DEPUTY-PRESIDENT (The Hon. Kaye Griffin): Order! I direct that the clock not be started for the adjournment debate until the Hon. Luke Foley has concluded his inaugural speech. I ask members to extend to the Hon. Luke Foley the usual courtesies given to members making an inaugural speech.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY [5.00 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and pay respect to their elders. It is with pride and humility that I enter this place, Australia's oldest Parliament, as a representative of Australia's oldest, and greatest, political party—the Australian Labor Party.

Today political parties are much maligned. I want to speak in their defence. Before the 1890s membership-based political parties did not exist. When elections came around, candidates representing ruling-class interests simply put themselves forward. Across the world, the parties of the Left invented the notion of party membership. The founders of my party came together because they knew they could only achieve decent treatment at work, free schooling, extensions to the franchise and reform of land laws through collective, rather than individual, action.

Above all, I am Labor, committed to equality, solidarity and social justice. I believe in the principles of the party and in a party of principle. I have been a member of the Australian Labor Party for 22 years. I served the party in a full-time capacity as Assistant General Secretary of its New South Wales branch from 2003 until June this year. I have some experience of Labor's remorseless internal politics. I have always felt that our members and supporters deserve a party machine worthy of Labor's message. Political power is a means to an end; it should never be the end in itself. I reject the empty pursuit of power. There is no honourable political future for a Labor Party that will not uphold courageously the principles from which it draws life. My political involvement has a purpose and a direction. My idealism imagines a better kind of world.

I draw inspiration from one of the great radical documents in human history: the American Declaration of Independence. What was radical in 1776 was the notion that government arose from the people and was not a gift to them or an imposition on them. The American Declaration of Independence established the concept of human rights, for the first time in history, as the basis for a nation. I hold human rights to be universal. I do not believe that, in today's world, human rights are the exclusive preserve of Westerners. Anti-totalitarianism is at the heart of my politics. Today a totalitarian movement of the far Right is threatening pluralist democracies and the lives and freedoms of people in many societies, including our own. This global Islamist movement is misogynist, racist and homophobic. This movement's extremist ideology is, of course, based on an utter perversion of the Islamic faith. Too many progressives are silent about this or deny this. Governments everywhere have a profound duty to protect their citizens from the threat of extremist Islamist terrorism. I intend to maintain an active interest in this over my time in this place.

My values are social democratic values. When I talk of my commitment to equality, I mean the concept of equality that Gough Whitlam promoted over a quarter of a century in the Commonwealth Parliament. Whitlam wrote:

... increasingly, a citizen's real standard of living, the health of himself and his family, his children's opportunity for education and self-improvement, his access to employment opportunities, his ability to enjoy the nation's resources for recreation and cultural activity... are determined not so much by his income but by the availability and accessibility of the services which the community alone can provide and ensure.

The quality of life depends less and less on the things which individuals obtain for themselves and can purchase for themselves from their personal incomes and depends more and more on the things which the community provides for all its members from the combined resources of the community.

These "things" that Whitlam referred to are so often the preserve of State Government: modern schools, state-of-the-art hospitals and community health services, accessible public transport, safe streets, a flourishing artistic and cultural sector, social housing, and our natural environment protected for all to enjoy. Providing these things—which only the community, not individuals acting alone, can provide—should always be the essential purpose of any State government. It is that essential purpose that led this State's very first Labor Government, Jim McGowen's, to build the garden suburb of Daceyville to provide housing for working-class families. It is that essential purpose that led the Cahill Labor Government to build the Sydney Opera House, and it is that essential purpose that has led this Labor Government to rebuild or upgrade nearly every major hospital in this State since 1995.

I believe that governments should direct resources to overcome disadvantage. The sum of our individual decisions does not add up to the kind of society that we want to live in. I believe in a strong society where we owe obligations to each other. What gives us in the Labor Party moral purpose is our conviction that the fortunate have a responsibility to the unfortunate, that the strong should help the weak.

For seven years I organised and represented workers predominantly working in the social and community services sector. These men and women work with the downtrodden, the excluded and the marginalised. They are ordinary workers who do extraordinary things. They are passionate and dedicated and they are underpaid and undervalued. What does it say about our values as a society when these men and women are among our lowest paid workers? Community workers make a difference every day. It is time we properly recognised them for the work they do. I am proud of my union, the Australian Services Union, for organising these workers. When justice prevails and community workers win pay equity it will fall to governments to fund our social and community services so that they have the capacity to pay.

I support the struggle by cleaners for justice and dignity at work. Workers in the contract cleaning industry should not have to worry about their jobs every time a different contractor takes over, nor should they miss out on long service leave or lose their sick leave accruals. It is wrong that a person can clean the same school, building or shopping centre for 10 years or more and have no entitlement to long service leave. I welcome the Government's in-principle agreement to establish a portable long service leave scheme for workers in the contract cleaning industry.

For as long as I serve in this place I will stand up for low paid workers. There are more than 400,000 of them in this State. Workers have the right to receive a wage that allows them to live in modest comfort. Employment may generally be the most reliable way out of poverty

but it has not protected all who work. A sizeable number of workers live below the poverty line. I have looked at data on the extent of poverty among households with at least one employed member. In just under one-fifth of households living below the poverty line someone is in paid employment. These households contain the working poor. There are roughly 130,000 people in working poor households in this State. My concern is that the household incomes of the people at the bottom are not keeping pace with the cost of living.

I do not want to do away with enterprise; far from it. I do not criticise those who generate wealth; we need these people. I do want to see social justice for the marginalised. The gap between rich and poor scars our society. We have enormous wealth in this country. We can eradicate the structural causes of poverty and inequality. We, the prosperous, must not be blind to the great poverty that exists beside great wealth.

Immediately outside this Chamber is an impressive painting, *The Founding of Australia*, by Algernon Talmage. It depicts Governor Arthur Phillip and crew on January 26, 1788. The Union Jack flies between six tree stumps. Only minutes after the arrival of Europeans, the land clearing had begun. I intend to be an advocate in the Parliament and in my party for the environment. I will argue for a greener society—a society where economic prosperity and our quality of life are not underwritten by the needless destruction of our environment.

Those who argue that Labor's embrace of the environment is some newfangled dalliance at odds with Labor tradition, are mistaken. Protection of our natural environment is part of the Labor tradition. The very first New South Wales Labor Government protected large tracts of the Sydney Harbour foreshore, including what is today Taronga Park Zoo and Nielsen Park. Bill McKell, the architect of modern Labor in this State, created Australia's great alpine national park, Kosciuszko National Park. McKell toured the high country in January 1942. Over 10 days he travelled by car and on horseback, sometimes camping out, witnessing the effects of more than a century's grazing. McKell acted boldly, reserving the entire area—the first significant extension to the national park estate in the twentieth century.

The Wran Government saved the northern rainforests, massively expanded the Blue Mountains National Park system, banned sand mining in coastal national parks and introduced lead-free petrol. Neville Wran told the 1983 annual conference of the New South Wales ALP:

When we are all dead and buried and our children's children are reflecting on what was the best thing the Labor Government did in the twentieth century, they will come up with the answer, we saved the rainforests.

Bob Carr's government saved the coastal forests of the north-east and south-east regions. It created over one million hectares of magnificent new parks in western New South Wales and banned the broad-scale clearing of native vegetation. The first carbon trading scheme in this country, one of the first in the world, began in New South Wales in 2003. The Carr Government required the State's energy retailers to cap per capita emissions, and forced them into carbon offsets when they exceeded those levels of emissions.

I am delighted that the Keneally Government has acted to protect more than 100,000 hectares of iconic river red gum forest and wetlands. My advocacy for the environment will be underpinned by my fundamental belief in active government as a force for good. Government

action is required, and nowhere is that clearer than in the fight against global warming—the economic and, yes, moral challenge of our time.

I am a lucky person. An accident of birth has given me freedom and I have enjoyed the patronage, encouragement and support of so many people. To single out a few would be unfair to the many. To all Labor people who have given me total support, as an officer of the party and now as a member of the Legislative Council, I simply say thank you. I thank the officers and staff of the Legislative Council for the assistance they have afforded me since my election.

I do want to make special mention of my family. Mum instilled in me as a child faith in three institutions—the Labor Party, the Catholic Church and the Eastern Suburbs Rugby League Football Club—and on all three counts I have kept the faith, although I often find myself at odds with the controllers of each of those institutions! I thank my mum for all the sacrifices she made for my sister and for me. My sister and I are the first in our family to gain a university education, thanks to Gough Whitlam.

Becoming husband to Edel is the greatest single honour that has ever been afforded me. She left her home in Ireland to share her life with me. Our magnificent children—Aoife, Niamh and Patrick—have enlarged and enriched our lives. I hope I will always do credit to my family on both sides of the world, to my friends and supporters, and to the party that I am so honoured to represent, the Australian Labor Party. And I hope I will always be true to the people who most need an active government on their side.