

HON RONALD THOMPSON, MLC

Condolence Motion

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Leader of the House) [3.02 pm] - without notice: I move -

That this house expresses its deep regret at the death of Hon Ronald Thompson, a former member of the Legislative Council for the West Province and South Metropolitan Province, and places on record its appreciation for his long public service and tenders its profound sympathy to members of his family in their bereavement.

I move that motion to assist in marking the passing of a former member of this house, Hon Ronald Thompson. Ronald Thompson was born in Fremantle in 1917 and was later educated in Fremantle. Subsequently, he went to Perth Technical School, where he received a wool classing certificate. He later worked as a wool classer and taught wool classing to students. He subsequently became a shop assistant and, in a notable achievement that I think represents a lifetime of working on behalf of working people - quite nicely, in fact - he is listed in the *Parliamentary Handbook* as achieving the first successful pay for work case on behalf of female wool classers. Ronald Thompson went on to join the old Waterside Workers Federation of Australia, where he held a number of positions, including vice-president and acting president.

In a by-election in 1959, he was elected to the Legislative Council as the member for West Province, which became the South Metropolitan Province after 1965. I understand that he worked very hard in this chamber for a long time, particularly in management of bills for what we now call labour relations legislation, and was subsequently elevated with his appointment as Minister for Community Welfare in 1973 and later in the same year also became the Minister for Police. Following the defeat of the Tonkin government, he served as Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council from 1974 to 1976. From a brief reading of his final speech in this house, it seemed to me that Ronald Thompson was an old-fashioned Labor member who worked very hard for his constituency, both inside and outside the house.

Ron passed away on Tuesday, 16 May 2006, having lived a long and full life and contributed a great deal to the community that he loved so much, both as a private citizen and as a member of this house. I wish all his family and friends the deepest sympathy on behalf of the government and the Parliament of Western Australia.

HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral - Leader of the Opposition) [3.05 pm]: On behalf of the opposition, I wish to support the condolence motion moved by the Leader of the House relating to Hon Ronald Thompson, a former member of this house. Ronald Thompson served the Western Australian community for 21 years as a member of the Legislative Council, as a minister and as Leader of the Opposition in this house. He was a truly authentic representative of the traditional blue-collar Australian Labor Party and he was the last former MLC to have been elected under the old system of restricted franchise and voluntary voting.

Ron Thompson was, as we have heard, born and educated in Fremantle. He qualified as a wool classer, worked successfully as a wool classer, as a lecturer in this subject, as a storekeeper and as a waterside worker. He was a member of the Shop Assistants' Union, was later an official of the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia and joined the ALP aged 15. According to the biographical register of Western Australian members, he fought successfully for the right of female wool classers to receive equal pay. He was a keen sportsman in boxing, shooting and cycling and a strong supporter of youth-oriented community organisations.

In 1958 Ron Thompson was selected by the Australian Labor Party to contest a by-election for the West Province of the Legislative Council following the death of the long-serving MLC and minister, Gilbert Fraser. This three-member province had no relation to the later West Province that was centred on the escarpment but was based on Fremantle and included the whole south metropolitan area. Before 1965 only home owners and occupiers were eligible to vote for members of the Legislative Council. Elections were held on a two-year cycle for one-third of the MLCs, without reference to the Legislative Assembly, and both enrolment and voting were voluntary. This meant that the by-election in February 1959 was held only a few weeks prior to a general election for the Legislative Assembly. It would have been a massive exercise in encouraging electors to vote. Ron Thompson gained a majority of 669 votes over his Liberal opponent in a poll of 9 100 votes, a 43 per cent turnout. This was an unusually hard-fought contest for the West Province, long regarded as a Labor stronghold. However, by the subsequent biennial election in May 1960, Ron Thompson was comfortably re-elected with 60 per cent of the vote. With the reform of the Legislative Council by the Brand government in 1963, the West Province was renamed as the South Metropolitan Province and Ron Thompson was one of its two MLCs. He was re-elected with a large majority in the general elections of 1968 and 1974.

Ron Thompson was the first officially recorded government Whip in this chamber, serving from the 1971 election until he was appointed to the ministry to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Hon Bill Willesee in February 1973. He served as Minister for Community Welfare, Police and Tourism until the defeat of the

Tonkin government the following year, a demanding combination of portfolios. He was subsequently Leader of the Opposition for two years until March 1976.

Ron Thompson was a man of strong beliefs and convictions that caused him to vote against the party that he had served for 45 years and in 1977 to resign from the Australian Labor Party and complete his term as an Independent. It would have been a painful decision but one in keeping with his character and principles. To say that Ron Thompson was a Labor representative of the old school may sound like a cliché but it is a proper tribute to a man who served Fremantle and the state of Western Australia with dedication. As I have noted, he was the last survivor of those MLCs who had to win election under the old Legislative Council franchise and voting system.

He was, according to former President Hon Clive Griffiths, a particularly diligent and hardworking member in his electorate. This is highlighted in his farewell speech to this house when he said -

I must pay respect, particularly to my own wife and family, because life has not been easy for Dot. She has to put up with callers when our place has been like a public ward at Fremantle Hospital.

Ron Thompson was in his final three years as a member when I arrived here. I remember him as a tough, uncompromising and determined individual who did not suffer fools lightly. He never left me in any doubt about his views on a wide range of issues, and I admired him for it.

On behalf of the opposition, I extend our condolences to the family of the late Ronald Thompson. From a personal perspective, I extend my sympathy to his son Bob, a well-respected educator and colleague during my teaching career.

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Nick Griffiths): I thank the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition for their observations of the late Hon Ronald Thompson. When I was informed of the late Hon Ron Thompson's passing, I spoke to one of my colleagues. As a result, I read some of the *Hansards* in which Hon Ron Thompson features very prominently. I note he made his maiden speech in 1959 and delivered his farewell speech on 6 December 1979. The Leader of the Opposition has referred to some of the observations in that speech, but I will quote a little from pages 5959 and 5960 of the *Hansard* of 6 December 1979. It is in order for the house to have a sense of the sort of person Hon Ron Thompson was. He said -

I have tried to engender trust during the years I have been here, but I feel our failure has been - and I hope it will be retrieved - the loss of the common room which every member had to share, where members had to wait their turn to use one of the two telephones and where members had to wait for three days to get a letter typed.

In those days one had confidence in an understanding of fellow members. We are now locked away in separate offices and electorate offices, which I do not despise because they have taken considerable pressure away from the homes of members. I hope that in the future members will come closer together, irrespective of their party politics.

Then on page 5960, he went on to say about the house -

Over the years there has been a mutual trust between the older serving members. I get back to the point that there should be mutual trust amongst members.

Towards the end of his speech, he made this observation -

My political life has been enjoyable and the results of my work have been reflected in the ballot boxes over the years. That is what politics is all about. The only appreciation of one's dedication is shown in the ballot boxes.

I found his observations interesting. He had quite a bit more to say in his farewell speech. Later that evening - it was the last sitting day of 1979, and I trust the Leader of the House notes the date, 6 December 1979; it was not too late in the season - the then Leader of the House, the late Hon Graham MacKinnon, made some remarks about Hon Ron Thompson. When a political opponent says this about one of his colleagues, it is a very worthwhile observation and something I do not think I can better -

I could best conclude my remarks on Mr Thompson by saying that he has shown himself to be a man of integrity and strong principles. In addition, he possesses one of those admirable traits, a quiet but quick sense of humour which, I think, is a blessing if one is to survive the rigours of political life.

I think Hon Ronald Thompson, through his service to this house and our community, has left a considerable legacy. I join the two leaders in extending my deepest sympathy to the family and friends of the late Hon Ronald Thompson. I will cause copies of the *Hansard* to be provided to the late Ronald Thompson's family in accordance with our usual custom.

Question passed, members standing.