



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Ruby Florence Hutchison, MLC
(Member for Suburban)

Legislative Council

Thursday, 26 November 1970

Legislative Council

Thursday, 26 November 1970

APPROPRIATION BILL (CONSOLIDATED REVENUE FUND)

Second Reading

THE HON. R. F. HUTCHISON (North-East Metropolitan) [3.03 pm.]: I rise to speak with mixed feelings because as members all know this is my last appearance in this Parliament. I have some nice memories of my time here. I have always found everyone to be most friendly. I have no complaints about the Legislative Council in that regard, although I entered this place as an antagonist and I still hold my political views in that direction. I thank the members of this House—and especially you, Mr. President, particularly during the period before you were President—for the kindness they have extended to me.

I read an article today which indicated that 22,000 young women of 18 years of age will be eligible to vote at the next election. That was not possible when I entered Parliament and it gives me great pleasure to know that those young women will be able to vote. I hope some of them will become members of this Chamber so that they may argue against the men. Up till now we have had only one lady member of this House, I will do all I can to help women to be elected to this Chamber. A young woman has already been selected to follow me. I hope she gains election and I will be looking forward to that.

The appearance of women in the Legislative Council is now possible as a result of many arguments put forward in this Chamber by the Labor Party for adult franchise for all women. In my opinion, the responsibility that goes with the right to vote will have a good effect on youth. I think the lowering of the voting age will benefit society as a whole. It may well develop a more stable attitude in the young in the future because I feel they will definitely take an interest in public affairs at an earlier age, which the older generation did not have the opportunity to do when 21 years was regarded as the age of adulthood.

Much public interest is shown in adolescents nowadays. They have more knowledge and it appears that the present generation is far more advanced than previous generations. Education is being upgraded, and I think that is of great importance because it will help to stabilise public thought and action to the benefit of society as a whole.

This House is still a House of privilege, and the boundaries still remain undemocratic. The boundaries are still drawn up by the Liberal and Country Parties in such a manner as to make it impossible for Labor to win a majority in this House. That has been a fact ever since I have been here. Labor cannot progress because this is still the most powerful House in the British Commonwealth, more powerful even than the House of Lords where a Bill, after a second challenge by the Commons, automatically becomes law. However, in Western Australia as it is at present one could go on forever without gaining anything.

I have in my hand a few of the Bills I was responsible for bringing to Parliament. One of the most important is connected with the jury reform system and I was successful in my efforts to have women recognised as competent to serve on juries. I will never forget the day I approached a certain gentleman about this. He was a lawyer and he was absolutely horrified that I should even suggest that women should serve as jurors. He said it was a dreadful thing. I told him that times were changing and I said I was sorry I had struck such a backward young man, and I moved on. However, the right for women to serve as jurors came to pass. It is taken for granted now and much good has come from it.

I think one of the instances in which a woman's point of view is most valuable is in relation to juries. Only a woman looks at the different sides of nature because she understands her children and as they grow into men and women she understands their problems. I was happy to read some time ago that the first woman judge had been appointed in Britain. When I visited Great Britain I went to see her and I found that she is a lovely woman. I think the men who appear before her would not mind being judged by her because she is such a nice person.

We have made very much progress in regard to the prejudices I had to fight when I first entered Parliament and which I encountered in my public life—and I was in public life long before I entered Parliament. I do not give women all the credit for having brought this about: I would have to agree that men have done much to bring it about.

The Hon. W. F. Willesee: When I first saw you it was love at first sight.

The Hon. R. F. HUTCHISON: I cannot help that, Mr. President, it just seems to come naturally! While I have had some very worrying moments during my life here I have also experienced some very happy times, for which I thank the members of this House. I am very sincere in what I say in this regard.

I suppose I had some right to expect support from the members of my own party, but I must say that I appreciated very much the attitude and the consideration shown me by members from the other side of the House. I daresay that on many occasions when I was handling legislation or speaking to a particular measure, they probably considered me an old hag, but, by and large, they have shown considerable restraint and patience.

My visits to other countries, particularly to Ireland and Great Britain were very pleasant indeed and, if they did nothing else, they helped me in my approach to problems as they arose. I was asked by the women in those countries how the men viewed my position in this House; what the Australian men were like, and what they said.

I replied that by and large I was accepted as a member of the Legislative Council which comprised not only Australians but also Englishmen and Irishmen. I was very unhappy about the situation I witnessed in Northern Ireland. Ireland is a lovely country and it is a pity to see such strife evident in that area.

I was particularly moved when I stood at a little place in the south of Ireland. I was taught by the Dominican Nuns and they all came from that area. It is times like these when there comes to one snatches of songs which one has heard in one's childhood. One song I recall went something like this—

There is not in this wide world a valley so sweet
In the depth of whose bosom the bright waters meet.

This refers to the meeting of two rivers in a particular area. As members know, I did, of course, take Fred along with me to educate him in these matters. He was a most apt pupil and I found him very obedient.

The Hon. A. F. Griffith: I am glad that is your experience.

The Hon. R. F. HUTCHISON: We also visited Scotland where we were engaged in work on epilepsy.

One of my great joys in this House has been in having Mr. Wise as a colleague. Before I entered Parliament he was a legend to me, and the judgment I formed of him at that time has in no way altered. He is a fine man and Parliament can be justly proud of him. I thank everyone in this Chamber for all they have done for me.

I would point out, however, without wishing to strike a discordant note, that I propose to continue to fight for the abolition of the Legislative Council, because I feel Western Australia would be far better off with one House of Parliament. It would not then be possible to have the political manoeuvrings that are so evident when it is necessary to get legislation passed. Our Legislative Council is still the most powerful House in the British Commonwealth. I know what I am talking about, because I have gone into this matter very thoroughly. We are a young and growing country, and I think it would be to our benefit to abolish the Legislative Council.

I recall my early life on the goldfields. It was always a challenge and I think we all know that the riches of this great country of ours have yet to be fully tapped. If we do not act now we might pay the penalty later.

I trust that all members have a happy time. Everybody has been most marvellous to me and I wish each member in this House all the good things he might wish himself.