



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Martin Pritchard, MLC
(Member for North Metropolitan Region)

Legislative Council

Loan Bill 2015

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LOAN BILL 2015

Second Reading

HON MARTIN PRITCHARD (North Metropolitan) [5.08 pm]: Thank you, Madam Deputy President. Firstly, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and recognise the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet. It is with great humility that I rise to speak today, this being my first real contribution to this place. May I start by expressing my gratitude to the President, to the Clerks, and to all the parliamentary staff, for their assistance and for making me feel so welcome since my swearing-in.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the electors of North Metropolitan Region for their continuing support of the Labor Party, and, in this particular instance, of me personally. I will work hard to try and justify the trust that they have placed in me.

Before I speak a bit about myself and the aspirations that I hold, I would like to acknowledge the work of those who have recently held this position before me. I have had the pleasure of knowing and collaborating with Hon Edmund Dermer and Hon Ljiljana Ravlich for nearly 20 years. During that time, I have seen the tremendous contributions that both of these fine individuals made to the lives of all Western Australians through their work in this place. I can only hope that I can emulate their drive and commitment in the years to come.

Turning now to my own journey, I was born in 1959 in Lymington near the New Forest in the south of England. We lived in a caravan park for the first few years of my life, but it was not long before we moved a couple of miles away to a council house in New Milton. Even at that age, I knew that my parents were doing everything they could to provide my sisters and me with the best home that they possibly could. As an aside, I believe that housing or, more particularly, the ability to build a home for your family is where it all begins. It is where our young learn the fundamentals of life and where we first teach them right from wrong. I think that it is important to do all we can to hold on to the great Australian dream of owning our own home, but the quarter-acre block should be consigned to the pages of the history books. For that reason, I hold some real concerns about the reduction in and, more recently, the proposed abolition of the first home owner grant as it applies to established properties. I understand that it is proposed to continue for new housing, but in my view this change may only contribute to the urban sprawl, particularly in the northern corridor. I think that the removal of any assistance for buying existing homes could have the effect of driving young families—those that are most likely to take advantage of assistance afforded to owning a new home under the grant—further and further away from the support of their extended family, who are more likely to live in more established suburbs that are closer to the city. I would think that this change could encourage an increase in overall costs as we build more and more infrastructure to support the urban sprawl. I believe that we need to look at new initiatives that encourage high quality, high density housing within the boundaries of the existing metropolitan area—initiatives that encourage two, three or even four homes on that quarter-acre block, which has all the infrastructure already present. I see some moves in this direction already, but we should do more. I see so many positives in taking a fresh look at what we are currently doing in this area that it will be something that I want to turn my mind to while I am in this place. Anyway, back to my childhood.

The family's next move was a little further than the first. On my eighth birthday, my father, Ken, mother, June, and my two sisters, Beverly and Theresa, made a life-changing voyage to Fremantle on the *Fairstar* to take up a new life in Western Australia. For those members who take an interest in the different cultures that have chosen to make Australia their home, I can confirm that, yes, it is true, we were ten-pound Poms. I do not say that with any derision whatsoever as I believe that Australian society has grown rich, strong, interesting and durable with the contribution of the different waves of immigrants that have arrived on these shores over the years.

Of course, there were many challenges for my family then, as there are many challenges for all new Australians, but the tolerance, lifestyle and opportunities that are available in Australia are second to none. Coming from a predominantly Anglo-Saxon country like England spared us many challenges, such as learning a new language, learning new laws or getting to understand the new culture, but we still had many other challenges to contend with. We had to build a new home and make new friends, and although things were similar, they were not always the same. What struck me most at that age was the distances people had to travel. Many of the old neighbours in England would have only travelled out of the village once a year when going on their yearly holiday. It was quite a shock to the family when dad told us that he was going to some place called Tom Price to work and that he would only get back to Perth occasionally because of the distance. I still remember the shock when I finally looked at the atlas at school. I do not think even now many people in England could comprehend the standard daily commute of one of my constituents in the northern suburbs. During my time in this place, I hope to work towards reaching some consensus on how we might reduce the frustration that this daily travel creates. I would like to congratulate the opposition leader, Mark McGowan, for his continuing contribution to the debate on the problems that congestion causes families in the northern electorates. I think that his suggestion, as encapsulated in Metrohubs, is a bold plan to bring jobs out to where we live, thus reducing the waste of time and the pollution that occurs every day as we spend hours on crowded public transport or in our cars getting to and from work. We sometimes need to be bold if we are going to tackle big issues that are having a negative effect on the families that we represent.

It reminds me of when I was young and my dad would take us kids to Perth to see a movie or to do some shopping or even to have lunch at a cafeteria at Coles Variety store. These days all of this is available in our own suburbs at our own local shopping centres. Of course, this does not make our Perth Lord Mayor very happy, but it does make it easier for families. It seems to me that in years to come more and more of our jobs may be able to be relocated nearer to where we live. But, again, I digress.

The isolation that my parents must have felt with my dad working away was just one more sacrifice that they were prepared to make in an effort to buy and establish a home for the family. I feel I must declare my admiration of all parents, including my own, for taking such a leap of faith into the unknown for the sake of their children. In hindsight, it was probably this challenge, amongst the many, that led to my mother and father parting ways not long after our arrival. One would think of a divorce as being a very sad event, and it was back then, but when the result has been that they have both found loving life partners of their own, I find it difficult to think of it that way now. I feel lucky to say that I am happy to also call Catherine and Hans my parents, and I would like to sincerely thank both of them, along with my mum and dad, for raising me to the person I am today. I, like many others, hold a view as to what an optimal family unit might look like, but my own upbringing has taught me that the most important components in any family are love and commitment. I enjoyed both of these in abundance throughout my childhood.

Although I attended what I believe to be good public schools, being Hampton Park Primary School and Hampton Senior High School, I was not a scholar by any stretch of the imagination; indeed, I left school as soon as I was able on the pretext of trying to learn a trade. My first attempt at gaining this Holy Grail was as a timber machinist. The fact that I still have all my fingers is not a testament to how successful I was but, rather, that I parted ways with that career very soon after I started. If I was being kind to myself, I might say it was by mutual agreement, but the reality was that leaving school at that early age left me very much unprepared for the responsibilities of life as an adult. I think that it was my latter realisation of just that fact that led to my strong support of the planning and the provision of recognised traineeships as a further alternative to traditional apprenticeships or the university stream as a career choice.

Until recently, I was the chairman of the board of the Retail and Personal Services Industry Training Council; indeed, it was in this role that I first had the pleasure of meeting Hon Peter Collier, when he was the responsible minister. I must admit to being very impressed by his passion and support. I would like to take this opportunity to wish the CEO, Norma Roberts, and the new chairperson, my continuing support and good wishes for the future—my apologies for further digression.

My father then tried to help, as he always did, by trying to teach me his own trade. My father was a very good bricklayer, which is one reason why we were sponsored to come to Australia in the first place. He spent many months trying to instil in me the skills required of his trade. Even now I can remember what he said of every job he ever did. “Martin,” he would say, “it should always be straight, level, plumb, neat and tidy”. I know he is the best bricklayer in the world but either he is not a great teacher or I was just not that good with my hands. The intervening years have taught me and my long-suffering wife that it is most likely the latter, which is why I decided to try to get a job in one of the service industries. My dad did teach me a good work ethic, which has served me well in every job I have had in the intervening years.

My first job in retail was at Coles Variety, both in Melbourne for a short time and then in Victoria Park. Although I was grateful to have regular employment, what struck me most about my work environment was the inherent unfairness of opportunity. I will qualify that by saying that it is no longer the case, but back in the 1970s a woman could realistically aspire to no more than a front-end controller. In contrast, even a new young pup like me was put on the accelerated management program just because I was a man. People who know me will understand how badly this affected me. I am not a person who can embrace unfairness of any kind. I am not even a fan of positive discrimination, although I accept that it is sometimes necessary to achieve a fair outcome. Then again, I also do not believe that the ends justify the means, which just goes to prove that there are no simple answers. At least I was able to recognise it for what it was, but unfortunately, as the young man I was back then, I felt helpless to tackle such an ingrained problem.

Luckily for me though, a job became available at the Aherns store in Perth. Although it turned out that there were other challenges, at least there was no inherent favouritism based upon gender. I had been a union member at Coles, but it was at Aherns that I first became active within my union. Little did I know at that time how big a part of my life my union was to become, but I will return to that shortly. It was also at Aherns that I met the love of my life and the woman who I wanted to spend the rest of my life with; fortunately for me, they were one and the same person.

My future wife, Gina, was working for the Lotteries Commission when I first met her. It had a counter on the ground floor of Aherns back when it sold lottery tickets. Lottery tickets are probably one of the best indications of how fast-paced our modern society has become. Those who are a fair bit younger than me will not credit it, but we used to buy 50 cent lottery tickets and wait months for the results of that particular draw to be published in the local newspaper—a

far cry from the almost instant gratification of lotto. I use the term gratification loosely as I suppose that is what people feel when they win; a feeling that, to date, I am unfamiliar with.

I cannot say how much money I spent buying lottery tickets before I finally found the courage to ask Gina out. I remember that for our first date we went to the movies to watch a new release called *Flying High* and then went to the Red Castle restaurant in Rivervale for a meal. Neither the cinema nor the restaurant is still in operation, but I remember that night like it was yesterday. I think we clicked straightaway, but it was not till I found out that she had spent \$50 just doing her hair that I really thought that this young lady might really be interested. Just to give you some idea of what that meant, I can tell you that back then \$50 was a significant part of a week's wage. Not that I ever regretted it, but I can finally reveal that I also spent nearly a week's wage that night. All I can say is that I was very pleased to have one of the newly introduced Bankcards that week. Things moved rather quickly from there and I am happy, proud, and delighted to say that Gina and I have now been married for 33 years. It would be true to say that there has been no greater influence on my life than my wife. Even so, just for the benefit of any media that may be listening, I did have a life before marriage. I was a young man growing up in the 1970s. It was a time of ridiculous clothes, annoyingly few Sunday sessions, petrol rosters, disco and a funny type of innocence. I, for one, can truthfully say that I never inhaled but I did down quite a few middies during that time. For those of you who can remember, and some of you who were there but cannot, these were interesting times. But however delightful my formative years may have been, there is nothing that has made me happier than my marriage to Gina and the children who have come from it.

It was at this time that I really started to grow up and think about my future—or should I say, our future. I was in a job I really liked and I had met a young woman who I wanted to make a home with. When you get to that point in your life, you really start to think about the quality and security of your life. That means looking at the status of your employment because it is your job that allows you to provide the necessities of life for your family, but I believe that it also provides the backbone to any productive life. It was all the more important because we had decided that, if it were possible, one of us would stay home to look after any children that we may be blessed with, at least in their early years. Our resolve on this was put to the test sooner than we had anticipated with the birth of our first child, Jessica, almost one year to the day after our marriage. Although Gina took this first opportunity to be a homemaker, I was to get my chance a couple of years later with the birth of our second child, Danielle.

With my half of the marriage partnership at this time being to maintain a steady income into the household, I looked around my workplace with a critical eye; what I saw was worrying. I had a reasonably good boss, being the Ahern family, but I also saw that they had a propensity to hire well-connected socialites in positions of management in many of their high-fashion areas. I can tell you, Aherns had a lot of high-fashion areas. Unfortunately, many of these people had very little human management skills, which in my view, often led to unjust outcomes when conflicts occurred. I also became aware of just how low the union density was, which also suggested to me that there was no real balance in the working relationship. If there was no union and a manager gave you an instruction that you disagreed with, you were left with the three Ls: like it, lump it or leave. As you would expect, conflicts did not happen regularly, but they did happen and what did you do when there was real disagreement, for example, about how you had been spoken to, or working overtime on public holidays when you wanted to spend time with your family? It was inconceivable that an employee would complain directly to the Ahern family, or run off to the Industrial Relations Commission to have it dealt with. If you were not in the union, you were left with the three Ls. It was at this time that I again joined the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, which is better known as “the shoppies” or the SDA. I also started to take notice of what the SDA did outside my workplace. Back then, much of the work to improve wages and conditions was being accomplished by improving the

underpinning state awards. I saw the new leadership team of Mark Bishop and Joe Bullock reinvigorating the union that had responsibility for looking after workers in one of the biggest employing industries in the state. Although my initial foray into trying to unionise fellow workmates at the Perth store was nothing to write home about, I was very impressed at the successes that Mark and Joe were having at improving the status of shop assistants at that time. I was also very grateful because their work was having a direct impact upon my pay packet.

Their success was even more important as I moved first into married life, then parenthood and finally into homeownership. It was not long into our marriage before I realised that what Gina and I had was a true partnership. Gina initially did all the groundwork for buying our first home, then camped out in front of the real estate office, in what was then the new part of Heathridge, for a couple of days and nights so that we could get the perfect block to build our home on. Truth be told, I am not sure that even now we totally agree on what constitutes the perfect block but I did become very proficient at building many, many, many retaining walls out of old railway sleepers. Still, the fact that we had our own home was all down to Gina's hard work and persistence and I love her dearly for that. I, for my part, was working fairly hard at the time in a couple of jobs putting money aside for the deposit, so sleep and I were strangers there for a while. One of the extra jobs I had during this time was working on the weekends as a waiter at the Bazookia Restaurant in Northbridge. Sad to say, this restaurant is also not in operation and is now a car park—just another sign of the changing times.

With the move into a new home in the northern suburbs, I also transferred to the Aherns store at Karrinyup. What I found there was much the same as what it was like at the Perth store: low union membership and the ever-present three Ls. Feeling that all that was really needed was some knowledge and advocacy from the union, I put up my hand to be a workplace delegate. I knew in my heart that all the right components were there to achieve a fair workplace. We had a good employer and a responsible union and I thought that all we needed was for my fellow workmates to support their union and we would have an even playing field, which would then lead to more respect and fairer outcomes in our workplace.

Members can probably gather by now that I am a big fan of democracy and that totalitarianism is not acceptable to me in any form even if we have a benevolent dictator. Similarly, communism is not acceptable either. I believe people should be given help according to their need but people also need to be rewarded according to their effort.

It was around this time that I met a young Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association organiser who fomented in me this growing feeling that shop assistants needed a strong, conservative union to work on their behalf, and shop assistants needed to reciprocate that support if it was all to work. The organiser in question was a slightly younger version of Hon Kate Doust and I would like to thank her publicly for showing me, by example, the pure joy that comes from a lifetime of service to working men and women. Well, one thing led to another; I was introduced to Mark and Joe and I am pleased to say that they provided me with an opportunity to spend the next 27 years of my life trying to improve the circumstances of shop assistants. But again, I will come back to that in a moment.

My marriage to Gina gave me the opportunity to add to my tally of parents; in this case, my parents-in-law John and Nina Doneo. They have been a source of good advice and unfailing support for me ever since I had the audacity to marry their eldest daughter! They also were immigrants to this country and, interestingly, also sailed here on the *Fairstar* on a voyage, just before my own, travelling through the Suez Canal. My own family travelled the longer way around past the Cape of Good Hope, which I must say was a fair bit rougher. Similarly, the Doneos brought their three children, Gina, Fernanda and Raymond, to a new country to try to give them a better life. Theirs is a very interesting story from their origins in Egypt but they

have also had their fair share of tragedies. In 1989 we lost Raymond to a fishing accident. To say he was the light of our lives would be an understatement. Indeed, I did not think John or Nina would make it through that sad time, but very slowly, with the support of the family, they survived. More recently, in 2013, we also lost John. I feel the importance of this day more keenly because of his passing, as this was always something he had encouraged me to do. I remember him as being generous to a fault but never wasteful. I remember him as a good family man, a good Labor man and a complete gentleman at all times, even after a glass or two of red wine. I miss him greatly.

My marriage to Gina has also given me the shining lights of my life, Jessica, Danielle and Lucy. It is with absolute pride that I say that they are the kindest, most generous and thoughtful young people that I have ever met. The fact that they actually do not mind spending time with the family has provided me with some of the happiest times of my life. There are, to date, three things in my life that give me meaning and overwhelming pride. I have spoken at length about the one I hold most dear, my family.

I would now like to talk about the second love of my life, which is my union, the SDA. As I have mentioned, in 1988, at the invitation of Mark Bishop and Joe Bullock and with the encouragement of Hon Kate Doust, I started working for the SDA. Earlier, I spoke about the importance of having a job. Working for the SDA has been so much more than a job to me. It has given me the means to make a home and raise a family but it has done more for me than that. It has provided me with dignity, purpose and the opportunity to fight for the same thing for thousands of SDA members who work in the retail and warehousing industry. Through my work at the SDA I have been lucky enough to have the opportunity of improving the lives of literally thousands of people, whether that has been by negotiating a fair exchange for a worker's labour, by saving a member's job or even just by giving workers the courage to stand up for their rights.

The fact that I actually got paid to help people still blows me away. Although I saw this as reason enough to dedicate myself to the SDA, and the union movement in general, I had thought that all the great battles had already been fought and, in many cases, won: the living wage, initially through the Harvester judgement; the eight-hour day and now more commonly the 38-hour week; long service leave; annual leave; sick leave; equal pay; penalty rates; and minimum conditions of employment. The list is endless. How wrong that turned out to be. As I have mentioned, I started working for the SDA in 1988, and since 1996 it has been my privilege to work alongside now Senator Joe Bullock as his assistant secretary, steering the SDA in this state at a time of great challenge. One of the first campaigns that the SDA was involved in during the early part of my employment was the fight to win the first three per cent universal industry superannuation. This was first achieved at individual worksites and then later, more broadly, through the award system. That the union movement won this for all working people around Australia is a matter of tremendous pride and to think I was part of that will remain one of the highlights of my life. It is also to the credit of the Labor Party that it took up the baton so that all working people currently have an additional nine and a quarter per cent on their earnings going into a fund to give them security and dignity in their retirement. That there will be problems as the baby boomers hit retirement is no secret, but it took the Labor movement, both political and industrial, to do the initial heavy lifting to try to come to grips with these issues. It is obvious that a lot more work still needs to be done in this area.

Another successful campaign at the forefront of my mind was the fight against individual employment contracts, at both a state and federal level. Of course, this approach to the power balance between the employee and employer is anathema to me and my sense of fairness. I remember representing a site of over 300 workers in Osborne Park where the employer had introduced individual contracts. Indeed, I think they were the pinup boys in this state for this type of employment arrangement. The fact that every contract was exactly the same did not seem at all ironic to the employer at that time. It took nearly 24 months of advocacy on behalf of

a majority of the employees to get rid of the contracts, but I am pleased to say that we are now on our fourth generation enterprise agreement with this company. Also, I think it would be safe to say that all parties now work together to try to achieve a healthy business that also provides good quality employment for its employees. Even more important to me is that everybody involved now feels that their voice is considered and respected. It seems a great pity to me that some employers think nothing of using the services of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia and other advocates, then decry the involvement of the employees' unions as some intervention by a third party. Thank goodness there are also many progressive employers out there who accept the fairness of employees working together with their union to improve their lot in life.

Even now, the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association is in the midst of a campaign to achieve 100 per cent pay at the age of 18 for its members. Although I personally believe that there is a place for junior rates for young workers to gain entry into the workforce, to expect an 18-year-old adult who takes on all the responsibilities of an adult to get paid as little as 70 per cent of an adult wage is awful. I commend my union for taking up this cause. I understand that thanks to the SDA, some progress has already been made with 20-year-olds in the retail industry now being paid the full adult wage; previously, they were paid 90 per cent.

As a senior official of the SDA, I had the privilege of working with many great people who have dedicated their lives to the service of retail and warehouse workers. I wish I could name them all, but time may not permit. I will content myself with naming just a few who have most influenced me. I could not talk about great people of the SDA without first mentioning the late Jim Mar. Others who have also provided leadership and stability at the national level during my 27 years with the union include Joe de Bruyn, Don Farrell, Gerard Dwyer and Ian Blandthorn. I wish to thank them for the example they have been and the friendship they have provided over the years. I wish to thank Joe Bullock and all the other officials, delegates and the committee of management of the Western Australian branch who I worked with during my tenure for their support and hard work that made every day a great adventure. I would like to wish the new WA leadership team of Peter O'Keeffe and Ben Harris all the best for the future. If you enjoy your new roles half as much as I have, you will count your lives as well lived. I would also like to thank Stephen Price and the Australian Workers' Union, and Tim Dawson and the Transport Workers' Union of Australia for their support over the years. I hope we can all continue to work as closely as we have in the past on behalf of working people.

It was when fighting the big union campaigns that I realised that working people needed more than just a strong union; they needed a strong political voice as well. That would not be a revelation to everyone here, but it hit me like a bolt out of the blue. It was while working on the big campaigns that I first thought that I might be able to make an even bigger contribution to the lives of my members through a role in state Parliament.

I have spent a bit of time talking about the journey of my life. I think that is most important, because it is within that story where you can find the physical expressions of my beliefs, experiences and concerns. These things are what drove me to a lifetime of service that has ultimately led me to this place. I believe in simple fairness and equal opportunity for all. This is not a simple slogan for me, it is a way of living, and although there are not always simple answers, we usually know in our hearts what the right thing to do is.

This then leads me to the third great part of my life—the Labor Party. With the history I had, the views I hold and the fact that I admired such luminaries as Bob Hawke, Kim Beazley and Paul Keating, it was only natural that I looked first to the Labor Party. I think all mainstream political parties have to be a broad church to attract the support required to form government, but I seemed to have found my natural home on the right side of left politics. I originally joined the Whitfords branch of the ALP in the late 1980s, before transferring to the Karratha branch when I

did a five-year north west stint for the SDA. It was there that I first became actively involved in an election campaign. It was for a former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Hon Fred Riebeling, to get him elected in his original campaign to enter politics as the member for Ashburton in a by-election back in 1992. We fought another successful campaign while I was there in 1994. I have continued to work on every state and federal campaign in the northern suburbs since the family returned to Perth in 1995. I have also been an active ALP member at all levels of the party, including being the current president of the local Kingsway branch.

Of course branches of the ALP work together quite closely, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank all branches in North Metropolitan Region for being so supportive of me personally in becoming a member of the Legislative Council. If I may, though, I would like to single out just a couple for special mention. I want to thank John Fragomeni, Sanjoy Dhar and the members of the Marangaroo–Darch branch. I would like to thank Andrew Vitolins, Suliman Ali and the members of the Ballajura branch, and also Maurene Palmer and Jim Bensen from my own Kingsway branch.

I would like to thank my fellow parliamentarians, in here and the other place, for their gracious welcome and assistance since being sworn in. It truly is an honour to be amongst you, but in my heart I am still just a family man and a Labor man, but underpinning it all I am a shop assistant who learned fairly quickly that fairness could only be achieved by being proactive and not just accepting things as they are. In my case it all started by being part of the SDA. I am looking forward to the next phase of my life, but I realise that it can only be built upon my past experiences.

The way I have been raised is to always listen to an opposing point of view with an open mind, but to be forthright in putting my own case. I believe I have developed the skills required to make a valid contribution to this place. I have enjoyed my 27 years of working in the union movement and see this as a natural progression to represent an even broader electorate. My motivation for running for a position in Parliament has a very simple genesis that has been instilled in me my whole life; that is, a sense of fairness and the need to reach to give a helping hand to those who need it. I can think of no better place to do this than here in the Legislative Council of the best state, in the best country in the world. I hope I can justify all the support I have received by, again, following my dad's advice, working hard and looking at every piece of legislation that comes before me with a critical eye to make sure that it is straight, level, plumb, neat and tidy. But most of all, I hope everything I do in this place improves the lives of the people we represent.

There are probably plenty of other people I should be thanking right now, but I hope to do that in person over the next few weeks. But the last thankyou—the place of honour—I save for my family. To my wife, Gina, and to my girls, Jessica, Danielle and Lucy, I could not have made it without your support. To Dad, Kit, Mum, Hans and Nina, I would not be the person I am without your guidance. To Raymond and John, I know you are up there looking down and looking after me. To Theresa, Ron, Bev, Craig, Fred, Gary and the rest of my family, I love you all dearly.

Thank you, Madam Deputy President and my fellow parliamentarians, for being so generous with your time.

[Applause.]
