

[Tuesday, 10 June 1997.]

HON GIZ WATSON (North Metropolitan) [4.31 pm]: Mr President, there is a mood of anticipation in the community, an expectation of change. I sense a mixture of trepidation and excitement. Being on the brink of change is either exciting or fearful, depending on one's view of the world. The views of members of the Greens (WA) are not all that well understood in the community, and many people have only a narrow understanding of the philosophies and ethics of the Greens - often limited to tree-hugging stereotypes. It is my hope that, with our increased representation in Parliament, our views will become better understood and integrated into mainstream thought.

First, I wish to give my heartfelt thanks and congratulations to my fellow Green Hon Jim Scott for the pioneering work he has done over the past four years. I am delighted to be part of the threefold increase in Greens parliamentarians, especially at this historic time of change. I also give special thanks to my partner, June, without whose love and help I would not be here today. Her support has been unfailing and her expertise in campaign management legendary. I also acknowledge the support of my parents and family who have always stirred me on to new challenges and have been a tremendous encouragement to me. My heartfelt thanks go to all the Greens' members and supporters who have worked long and hard, against huge odds to achieve this electoral success; in particular, all the lower House candidates and their support team members who gave freely of their time and energy and achieved excellent results in many areas.

To introduce myself, I will touch on my personal background and outline my hopes and aspirations for the future, and highlight the issues the Greens believe should be prioritised. I was born in England and had the good fortune of living in a beautiful part of the countryside. On coming to Australia with my family in 1967, I immediately fell in love - with the bush. It has been a lasting affair. It is by far the most magnificent country I have ever had the opportunity to visit - extraordinary in its landscape, breathtaking in its beauty, and blessed in its diversity of life. I am consistently inspired and sustained by this country. Therefore, it seemed almost inevitable that I would study environmental science, completing a degree from Murdoch University in 1981.

I went on to work in other areas, too, and completed my qualifications as both a carpenter and joiner and a registered builder. I successfully ran my own building company for 10 years in Perth and Albany. More recently, I have worked with many community groups around the Western Australian coastline to improve marine and coastal conservation. It was, and is, an inspiration and a pleasure to work with like-minded people to ensure the long term future of our magnificent, world renowned coastline and oceans.

To be clear from the outset: I believe in revolution! Traditionally revolution has been a dirty word in politics, evoking fearful images of chaos. However, our current behaviours and decisions are creating environmental and social chaos. A Green revolution seeks to change this direction, to establish a model where the highest care and consideration is given to sustaining the planet, and paramount importance is placed on the wellbeing of all members of our society. This requires a fundamental change of heart in many areas. Essentially it requires us to think about our society and our world as a whole, rather than fighting for the biggest patch for ourselves. It requires us to acknowledge our common humanity with all peoples and our vital connection with the planet and its natural ecosystems, and to act accordingly.

The situation in which we find ourselves in the 1990s calls for nothing short of a revolution - a revolution in attitude to the planet that sustains us; a revolution in practices; and a revolution in ethics. In other words, what philosopher Eric Fromm described as the revolution of hope. Over the past 25 years I have been involved in numerous community groups. I strongly believe that, as individuals, we can have a powerful impact on our world, if we stand up for what we believe in. As anthropologist Margaret Mead has said -

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has.

The current trend of economic rationalism has been described by Professor Ian Lowe, an Eastern States Green, as trying to fly a jumbo jet with no fuel gauge or altimeter, only a speedometer. Society's main goal has been the achievement of ever increasing profit and consumption. The primary indicator of our economic health is considered to be increased production. This view is not only morally bankrupt, but also ecological suicide and naively shortsighted.

It is morally bankrupt because it is based on a crude, short term view that the land and its resources are exploitable commodities, neglecting to acknowledge our long term needs and also our interdependency with the wellbeing of our land and other living things. It assumes the land and its resources are there for the taking, and fails to recognise that they are already fulfilling a vital job of sustaining natural processes, such as purifying our water, recycling nutrients and providing oxygen.

It is ecological suicide because resources are finite, as is the earth's capacity to deal with the ever increasing waste being created by expanding production. The pressures of human population growth combined with

irresponsible consumerism are placing an intolerable burden on our ecosystems. As one example, global conventional petrol production will start to decline in about five years; yet there is no sign that our current decision makers are taking this into consideration in their planning.

In Western Australia we have an important clean energy resource in the form of major natural gas reserves in our north west. Economic rationalism tells us that a dollar earned today is more valuable than that earned tomorrow, so the pressure is on to exploit everything as quickly as possible. Professor David Suzuki calls this the economics of extinction. If we were seriously thinking about our long term needs, we would use these reserves conservatively for the benefit of today's and future generations. These gas reserves will be worth infinitely more to future generations in an energy scarce world.

Greens promote the view that has long been held by Aboriginal people; that is, all of us should consider ourselves as custodians of the land and its resources with a responsibility to look after the land, sea and air for future generations and the wellbeing of other species. This is the revolution in attitude.

We must ask the right questions about what we produce and the method of production; whether a product is good and necessary and whether the method of production is the cleanest and best. We must urgently encourage clean, green and clever industries. This means innovative industries which are energy and resource efficient, producing socially worthwhile goods. So-called waste from our production processes should be seen as resources to be recycled.

As to a revolution in practices, I will look at the current situation in Western Australia, at the end of the twentieth century. We live in an ancient country, its ecosystems having evolved over millions of years. Western Australia's natural systems can be described as mega-diverse and the majority of its plants and animals are found nowhere else in the world.

Greens are often seen as the bearers of doom and gloom, and people are turned off by that. However, it is important that we are honest and confront the reality we find ourselves in, so we can make well informed decisions for the future. In the 200 or so years that Europeans have occupied this country we have managed to dramatically change the environment in which we live. Europeans, and the animal and plants that we have introduced, have caused land degradation on a massive scale. In Western Australia alone we have caused the extinction of 10 mammal species, two bird species and 39 plant species. One-quarter of WA's remaining plant species are listed as threatened with extinction. Native forests now cover a mere 1 per cent of the land area. This is less than half of the area before European occupation. The remaining native forests are subject to continuing overexploitation, mainly for low grade products. The Swan coastal plain now has a fraction of its native vegetation, and only 20 per cent of the south west wetlands remains. The majority of our commercial fish species are described as fully exploited. Very few of our current types and levels of land use practices, whether they be mining, farming, logging or fishing, are ecologically sustainable in the long term.

Salinity in our agricultural land is perhaps the biggest and most immediate crisis we face in Western Australia. A recent Agriculture Department report on salinity states -

WA has over 70% of Australia's reported dryland salinity, an estimated 1.8 million hectares of farmland are already salt-affected to some extent and this area could double in the next 15 to 25 years and then double again before reaching an equilibrium ... The fundamental cause of salinity is the replacement of deep-rooted native vegetation with annual crops and pastures used in agriculture ... The resulting annual agricultural loss will be approximately \$64 million annually until salinity reaches a new equilibrium some time in the next century.

Economists talk of debt; however, these are the kind of environmental debts which will by far outweigh any other. We also need to bear in mind this debt is only an estimate of the loss of agricultural productivity; nobody has estimated the debt incurred by the loss of species, water quality and topsoil and the loss of future opportunities. Under present production methods one tonne of wheat costs our land five tonnes of topsoil. It is an environmental disaster of awesome proportions. If any members are in any doubt I suggest that they take an aircraft and experience the true scale of the problem from the air.

Conservation minded people have long demanded a ban on further clearing of native vegetation. Greens (WA) will unequivocally support this. As Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation scientist Denis Saunders has said -

We have failed to sustainably manage our existing agriculture land, why should we allow any more to be cleared?

We also need to provide more resources to rural communities already struggling to grapple with the scale of these problems. Perhaps some of the so-called resource boom or perhaps the imminent gold royalty could be utilised. At the very minimum the revenue raised from resources that are exported - that is, leave our State forever - should at least pay for the maintenance of our environment that sustains us.

Another revolution in practice is the involvement and empowerment of the community to participate in decision making. First and foremost green politics is grassroots politics. We seek to decentralise power and maximise the freedom and self-determination of individuals and communities. We seek to involve the community in all decisions that affect them and draw on their knowledge and experience to guide our policies. We would like to open doors between government agencies and the community, and to break down the us and them mentality. It is our experience that well informed and empowered communities can usually solve most of their own problems and should be encouraged to do so.

I would like to preface what I am about to say about a revolution in ethics by asking members to consider what matters to them. Is it economic gain, surrounding ourselves with goods, the health and happiness of our families, the health of the community as a whole or the security and ability to live our lives without guns or gasmasks to protect us? If we do not consider what matters to us collectively - it is the responsibility of members particularly to consider the collectivity of what we do - what really matters will be lost and we will slide ever faster down the slippery slope of destruction of life as we know it. For example, our decision as a community to profit from the mining and export of uranium comes at a huge cost for thousands of people dying of radiation illness in places like Chernobyl.

The uranium industry plumbs the depths of moral bankruptcy and leaves behind a radioactive legacy of thousands of years. Exporting uranium is exporting cancer. It matters when we engage in this sort of unethical trade, and I am totally committed to stopping it. Likewise buying Nike shoes means that WA consumers are supporting the use of child labour. Other people's children are exploited for the profits of unethical multinational corporations. It matters that we shop with a conscience. Closer to home, it matters what companies we do business with. For example, the French government-owned company Rhone-Poulenc, which has recently been given the go ahead to establish a rare earth plant in Pinjarra, is implicated internationally in the dumping of thousands of tonnes of toxic waste along the coast of Brazil. Rhone-Poulenc also exports the world's most toxic pesticide to Third World countries. This pesticide has the potency to kill an adult with one drop on the skin. I ask members to consider the ethics of this company. It matters enormously when we do business with it.

There is a pressing need to revolutionise our values and create an ethic that values restraint over consumption, the collective good over individual self-interest and adversity over uniformity. That ethic also takes in a global view. Obviously for our society to be strong and healthy the basic infrastructure needs to be secure: Food, housing, education, health care, transport and entertainment. The glue that holds society together is the community's vision of self as a cohesive whole and the individual's sense of his or her own value within that vision. It is the acts of kindness that we experience that make life worthwhile. Caring about the wellbeing of others or receiving that care is what makes us function well as human beings. With an increasing number of people concentrating their primary concerns on economic gain the world becomes a dangerous place. Competing fiercely for limited resources polarises our society: Men against women, young against old, haves against have nots. A community which encourages cooperation and welcomes diversity will be strong and flexible and best able to respond to the future. A community which exercises consumer restraint and advocates actions which are supportive and which reflect collective good will not have alienated youth with destructive and antisocial behaviour. These social problems are a symptom of a dysfunctional society. The ever increasing drug problem is just one of the direct results of an unethical value system, a signpost warning us that our society is in need of radical readjustment.

On a recent visit to Perth international activist and writer Joanna Macy said -

In the future people will look back to this time and will call it something like "the great turning point".

Greens (WA) aim to play a part in that turning. We aim to build a society that values our young people as one of our most precious resources; values the world that they will inherit; values their ideas and creativity; and values their individual contribution to diverse culture. Older members of our community are often also overlooked. We have much to learn from their life experience and accumulated knowledge. We can learn from other cultures where older people are revered and esteemed and really listened to. Greens value diversity over conformity. Diversity is a natural expression of life, and that diversity includes equity within the law and an end to discrimination for the gay and lesbian community, of which I am a proud member. The Foss amendments must be repealed as they sanction discrimination in housing, in education and in the provision of services to gays and lesbians. Also it is time for the age of consent for gay males to be brought into line with the rest of the community - that is, 17 years old.

Greens support unequivocally the aspirations of Aboriginal people in this country to obtain land rights and recognise that huge injustices have been done to them and their culture. We will work with them in a spirit of reconciliation and cooperation. The coexistence of native title and pastoral leases on crown land is supported by

legal and historical fact upheld by the High Court. We will continue to argue that these facts be given real and just effect. We will also speak out clearly and loudly in support of a vibrant multicultural community.

In the area of industrial relations and particularly with the most recent undemocratic progression of the Government's labour relations legislation we will support the right to collective bargaining and the right of unions to negotiate on behalf of their members. In the North Metropolitan Region, I will work for a cleaner, healthier environment and pursue urgent action on contaminated sites, air quality and groundwater protection. We must also address the issue of Perth's ever-expanding population and recognise the urgent need to limit urban sprawl, specifically to create a regional park to preserve valuable remnant bushland, including the magnificent mouth of the Moore River at Guilderton, and to define the limit of Perth's expansion. We also must have a public transport system that is affordable, accessible and convenient to dramatically reduce our dependence on the private car.

I will also work to redress the erosion of public services. I believe that the benefits which are reaped from the State's resources should be shared more equitably.

In conclusion, the Green movement is a global movement for change - an idea whose time has come. Greens are represented in many Governments in countries as diverse as Brazil and Taiwan. Africa has 17 Green parties and the European Parliament in Strasbourg has 30 Green members. In Australia we have 12 elected representatives in State and federal Parliaments. As a Green representative I am committed to thinking globally and acting locally.

I am wholeheartedly looking forward to representing the constituents of the North Metropolitan Region, working with the broader community, fellow members of all political persuasions and parliamentary staff. I look forward to working towards a Green vision - a vision for a revolution in attitude, a revolution in practices, and a revolution in ethics.

My personal commitment is to stand firm on matters of principle and work in a spirit of cooperation and openness. I thank members for their attention.

[Applause.]