



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Philip Ross Lightfoot, MLA

(Member for Murchison–Eyre)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply: Second Day

Wednesday, 11 June 1986

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Motion

MR LIGHTFOOT (Murchison–Eyre) [8.07 p.m.]: Mr Speaker, I firstly congratulate you on your election to your high office. I also congratulate those new members elected with me at the February election.

I begin my address to the Chamber by taking the traditional and proper course of thanking all those people who are forgotten in the flush of the first heady days of parliamentary life. There are many such people who, as members here have experienced, fade from the mind, or because of casual contact remain nameless.

I therefore, with a few exceptions, thank the people of the towns in Murchison–Eyre who were the real victors in electing me to this Chamber; the people of Yalgoo, Mt Magnet, Cue, Meekatharra, Wiluna, Leinster, Leonora, Laverton, and Menzies. I have purposely omitted one of the greatest towns in my electorate to single it out for a special thanks because of its dedication, its belief in me, and its almost total, unqualified, and immutable support. Sandstone, Mr Speaker, is not big by any measure. Most members, I venture, have not been there. But what it lacks in civic amenities and ostentation it more than counters in dedication, public enterprise, hospitality, warmth, and the most elusive and vanishing Australian attribute, honesty!

Sandstone, Mr Speaker, is uniquely Australian, a microcosm of what we used to be when mateship, hard work, and commonsense were an integral part of daily life.

I did say that there were a few exceptions to the numerous people who were of great assistance to me and they are a mixture of Aboriginal and ordinary white Australians. Could I seek the indulgence of this House and record those special people without discrimination? They are Matron Sadie Canning, Reg Johnson, Cyril Barnes, Lesley Jane Campbell, Margaret Lacy, Pat Howden, Judy Varley, Kathy Finlayson, Don Boswood, Bill Biggs, Barbara Mellar, Gay Mathews, Hugh Wally, Margaret Moore, Jean Jeffries, Mario Tassone, and Barry Marlow. These are fine Western Australians, Mr Speaker. I will always be proud of them and I trust that they will have reason to be proud of me as their representative in this hallowed edifice.

I would like to speak further on what is a very special occasion for me and my family, about a subject of special significance to me and my electorate. I have steered away from the debilitating and retrogressive effect that I think socialism has in any particular State or nation. On purpose rather, I would like to address this House on a fundamental but diminishing aspect of our daily and future lives—a change that has and is altering our ways forever. I refer to our States' rights, or should I say, rights subject to Canberra, our Federal overlord.

Since the inception of federation in 1901, gradually, indisiously—and often, unfortunately, consciously—we have surrendered our heritage and traditions that were considered without question to belong, uniquely in some instances, to Western Australia.

These traditions or rights included our own postal system, stamps, and communications, and the ability to raise our own income tax, sales tax, import duty, customs duty, etc. We did not need approval to export our goods, such as our gold, wheat, and wool, and other minerals and agricultural products, as opposed to today, but I will come back to that in a moment.

We gave away also—and it was in retrospect a great mistake—our independent migration policy. That has become totally the prerogative of Canberra, to such an extent that we are not able to plan our own future properly without going to Canberra, subserviently, meekly, as a child would to a paternal power or authority.

It must be a sobering exercise in humility for Premiers—a unique experience for some of our Premiers—to go to Canberra with their hats in their clammy hands, to tell the Treasurer and Prime Minister, whose research facilities are second to none with respect to financial matters, why we should get more money *per capita* or greater grants than any other State.

Yet in round figures, eight per cent of people who choose to live and work in this, the Texas of Australia, earn over 20 per cent of this nation's export income in spite of government's heavy hand in industry. That income has its roots, its genesis, its beginning, in electorates like Murchison–Eyre, an area that covers a substantial part of the goldfields—I often refer to that region as the nation's nursery—where great men and women were born, or matured. They have included State political leaders, Federal and State Ministers, world-renowned pianists, sportsmen and women, philanthropists, and some of the nation's leading businessmen. The area even was host to a future President of the United States.

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Canberra is not only an insatiable sycophantic giant but is now being rivalled by Perth as a syphon for this State's wealth and destiny! But I will deal with one problem at a time.

At the time of changeover from a self-governing colony within the British Empire to federation there were only 190 000 people in this vast, diversified, one million square miles.

As we have grown and prospered, mainly because of our wool producers then our grain growers and miners, all of whom live substantially if not totally in the country and outback, so we have relinquished a great deal of our powers and our destiny to an eastern oligarchy—that small enclave in NSW. It could be said that they are our masters, our governors, our imperators.

We did not give up our independence to those people easily or in unison. In fact, had it not been for “t’othersiders” or Eastern States expatriates, the vote would have gone the other way on the federation issue and Western Australia would have been an independent, autonomous nation within the British Commonwealth instead of the subservient entity we are today.

So my goal as I see it, Mr Speaker, my charge and responsibility to the people of Murchison–Eyre and my fellow goldfielders, is to act as a watchdog, a guardian against the further atrophying and shrinking of Western Australian rights by insidious and often covert or duplicitous legislation from Canberra, like amendments to the taxation Act, the heritage Act, national land rights, and the most vexatious of all, the misnomer called the Bill of Rights. I feel that I am further charged with attempting to hold the scales more evenly, to regain from Canberra some of the decision-making and equity that most of my constituents agree is rightfully within the realms of Western Australia, the largest State of this federated nation.

We need more independence in areas of international air travel and the ability to process our own migrants. We need to be able to say what we export and, in some instances, bearing in mind the constitutional provisions with respect to free trade between the States, to be able to decide what we import. We need to be able to issue our own fishing licences and have more say in respect of Canberra's laws.

We need to be able to raise our own income taxes again, a right we gave to Canberra in 1942, without being disciplined or victimised by that city. We could be, given that chance, the progenitors of a new taxation system that this nation so desperately needs. Were we to regain this rather basic prerogative, for which there is little doubt that the hard working people of my electorate yearn now, surely in the future we would demand or entreat our federal masters for a flat taxation system that negates or replaces the tax madness that emanates from the increasingly alien Canberra.

The unbelievably cruel taxes of recent times are manifestations of this tax insanity sweeping the nation. I refer to the proposed gold tax that will surely close goldmines in Murchison–Eyre and send back some towns, like Phoenix in reverse, to ashes and abandoned debris. The fringe benefits tax has the potential to be even more devastating than the iniquitous proposed gold tax; and then there are the capital gains tax and the superannuation tax. The latter tax is on the retirement funds of all working men and women. All of these inequities are imposed by this parasitic Canberra, several thousand kilometres from our administrative centre. So much for federation and the protection of our States' rights—rights and equity that are blatantly and arrogantly ignored and transgressed upon even by some of our own Western Australian senators and House of Representatives members.

A true Western Australian patriot cannot but ask himself, what is in it for us? What is in it for Western Australia, with only a fraction of the nation's population, earning in excess of 20 per cent of export income? The answer has to be, by even the most ardent federalist, not much! And by a more pragmatic Western Australian perhaps, nothing! We only pay!

For instance our mining industry which keeps the Canberra nuclear-free tug afloat, pays Canberra 77c of every dollar it grosses. It is the prime cause of much of the debilitation of that premier and noble pursuit—not the high wages bogey. Yet Canberra still has the unmitigated gall and temerity to propose to heap on us a tax on gold—a tax that affects almost exclusively, Western Australia and ultimately all Western Australians!

One could not but feel, when this unjustifiable, inexcusable, and wicked tax was proposed, that the cost to this State and its people of remaining in the federation was too great a price to pay for unification.

We should in all reason, solidity, and depth, entreat the Canberra masters to remove or modify the tax on nickel, iron ore, and aluminium, and to better assist those commodities to compete on world markets, and to expand and offer greater employment and opportunity for our children and the unemployed, as the revival of the goldmining industry has illustrated so vividly in the past five years or so.

Mr Speaker, I spoke a moment ago of that other sycophant, Perth, the all-powerful city State, the “Vatican” of Western Australia, where laws are enacted as in Canberra, in the belief that they are for the good of Western Australians.

It is an odd fact that although this powerful city of Perth envelopes nearly 80 per cent of the people of the State's million square miles—a phenomenon existing in no other comparable area of land in this world—it has within its creeping suburban limits the only universities, the only subsidised passenger rail and omnibus facilities, the only comprehensive hospitals, the only teaching colleges, the only real art galleries, museums, and drug rehabilitation

centres—all Government funded or subsidised. The Government depends on the wealth earned by country and outback people to fund these often excessive and expensive institutions! So the sweat of non-urban people not only funds that obese eastern paterfamilias, but also feeds, to its debilitation, Perth and its myriad social departments, public servants, functioning institutions, barely functioning institutions, Police Force, ethnic groups, sectional interests, etc.

So I bring you back, Mr Speaker, if I may, to the growing inequity and antipathy between Canberra and Western Australia, an anomaly I am committed to work to rectify if I am able. But I am no less committed to put my best endeavours during my time in this House to see that more of the wealth generated, and fabricated, and created by people of mining and pastoral areas of this State substantially stays where it is earned.

[Applause.]
