

The Hon Kim Beazley MP, Member for Brand (WA)

First Speech To Parliament - 4/12/1980

I thank Government members for their indulgence. Mr Deputy Speaker, I join with the many honourable members who have congratulated you on your appointment to high office. I ask you to pass on my congratulations to Mr Speaker. I thank the electors of Swan most sincerely for doing me the honour of electing me to this House. I am uncomfortably aware that quite a number of previous members of this House have had occasion to extend their gratitude to the people of the same electorate. The people of the electorate of Swan are discerning and demand a high level of personal service from their member. They have had it in the past from both sides of the House - in that I include my opponent in the last election, the former member for Swan, Mr Martyr - and they will continue to have that service while I am their member.

Swan is a diverse electorate, but it contains a substantial number of people who have felt the chill blast of Government economic strategy. For that reason in particular I am pleased to second this amendment. If the Governor-General's Speech is anything to go by, they can expect more of the same. If anything, that Speech amounted to an apology by the Government for being so generous. In economic terms, the Swan electorate is made up largely of persons in receipt of age, invalid and supporting mothers' pensions and unemployment benefits, with others on award wages in the low to middle income brackets. It has been the Government's strategy in the past and I suspect it will be in the future to turn people in these categories against each other. Pensioners are told that reductions in the comparative real value of their pensions, stringent and absurd enforcement of provisions such as the 85 per cent disability test for invalid pensions, and the fact that marginal increases in earnings can remove their fringe benefits are a product of the Government's unwillingness to impose heavy tax burdens. On the other hand, the solid tax paying citizen who is

to be found in the low to middle income bracket in Swan is informed by this Government that his or her tax burden is a product of the Government's welfare obligations.

On this occasion, electors in Swan recognised the real source of their difficulties and voted against a government which has presided over massive increases in tax evasion in high income brackets and a niggardly and ungenerous attitude to citizens in real need. They also voted against a government which still has no strategy for the economic resurgence of Australia but which follows a drab, half-baked form of monetarism – it is not really prepared to pursue a full monetarist policy but is incapable of making use of the many alternatives. The only changed direction evident in the Governor-General's Speech is that instead of belt-tightening homilies the Australian electorate is now to be the object of pseudo-erudite expositions of Liberal philosophy. I expect underneath the steady drum roll of Government hyperbole we shall hear a subterranean scratching as the nineteenth century liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill spins in his grave as he hears the views he popularised bowdlerised by his contemporary Australian disciples. That humane thinker – as do all rational men – became a democratic socialist late in life and recognised that political freedom, vital as that is, means nothing if the daily experience of the citizen is tyranny in the work place, exclusion from real knowledge of how he or she is governed, and inequity in terms of economic power.

In fact, to describe the philosophy of this Government as 'liberal' is to deprive the word of meaning. Were it genuinely liberal there would be a preoccupation on the other side of the chamber with tough freedom of information legislation and human rights Bills. There would be concern over malapportioned electoral districts benefiting the State branches of the Liberal Party. The philosophy of this Government is a kind of bush constitutionalism – constitutionalism in the sense that it is preoccupied with elevating administrative arrangements and the distribution of powers between the Commonwealth and the States to the level of high

principles. Whenever a matter of individual liberty clashes with these arrangements it is the arrangements which triumph.

I think no better illustration of that can be found than in the answer of the Prime Minister (Mr Malcolm Fraser) to a question asked by the honourable member for Lilley (Mrs Darling) during last week, in which he said that we must be chary about looking at the human rights commentaries of Congress because were we to intervene it would involve using the external affairs power illegitimately. It is bush constitutionalism in the sense that even constitutional principles are jettisoned when party interest determines. This was the case in 1975. However, perhaps I ought not to be too picky because, after all, the Governor-General's Speech did say the Government would not be dogmatic.

Pop philosophy will not conceal the real inadequacies in the Government's economic strategy reflected most notably in its non-planning for the 1980s resources boom. Electors of Swan, like most Western Australians, are developing, along with their healthy optimistic outlook, an equally healthy cynicism about the capacity of conservative governments to direct resources booms in ways that benefit ordinary citizens. The immediate and long term economic benefits go elsewhere while we, the ordinary citizens, carry the economic costs of the infrastructure and accompanying government restrictions on domestic sources of money supply.

I will take some simple indices to illustrate both points. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, under the Whitlam-Tonkin governments, Western Australia in 1973-74 enjoyed about 100 per cent of the Australian average per capita income. Under the Court-Fraser governments this had fallen last year to about 93 per cent. We were beaten for the wooden spoon, however, by Queensland at about 86 per cent. This, of course, says nothing about a relative decline in the real value of Australia's average income. It points, however, to Western Australians moving quite rapidly to a position of considerable disadvantage. If money is being made from the minerals boom it is not being made

by the citizens of Swan. If money is not being made directly by the people it is certainly not being made indirectly through the Government. Because we in Western Australia are not informed we do not know the full extent, but we do know that through our taxes, rates, and government service charges we are carrying a considerable portion of the burden of the infrastructure development necessary for resources projects. We will shortly know, as the Government soaks up the supply of domestic money, the cost of last month's \$1 billion capital inflow on our housing mortgage interest rates. Later, as local manufacturing industry finds economic survival difficult, we will find the cost of unplanned resources development being reflected in the loss of jobs.

Were the Government to take the mineral boom in hand to ensure that real benefits flowed directly and indirectly to Australian citizens, through such proposals as a resources rental tax, there would be the funds to consider effective and innovative schemes for people in real need in our community. For example, we could consider proposals to make the pension wholly or partially non-taxable, to permit people the fruits of their own superannuation schemes, life savings and small additional earnings. We could once again review the continuing areas of need, particularly on the capital works side of our education system, where there have been over the last few years quite dramatic Government cuts. In a planned exploitation of resources we would have the satisfaction of knowing that our national sovereignty was secure and the interests of future generations adequately served.

I would like now to pass to the final portion of the Governor-General's Speech where Government views on national security issues were placed before us. The time has come for a serious Western Australian interest in the direction of Government defence planning. The Australian Constitution, in section 119, states:

the Commonwealth shall protect every State against invasion.

For most of Australia's history this commitment has largely been without meaning in terms of Australia's defence doctrine, force structure and deployment. Our defence effort has been focused on the south-east, north-east and in forward activities with our allies. In keeping with national Labor's long tradition, stretching through two world wars, of sound and innovative defence planning, the last Labor Government firmly based Australia's defence doctrine on the concept of defence self-reliance. Initially, and still formally, this Government committed itself to that doctrine as its 1976 White Paper indicated, and the Labor Party strongly supported it when it did so. It can do nothing else for, as Dr Ross Babbage, in a recent thoughtful work on Australian defence pointed out:

. . . because the forward defence concept is no longer viable, Australia's defence policy in the future is likely to be primarily concerned with the development of an independent capacity to secure the nation's immediate environment – the continent itself and its offshore islands and resources.

Western Australians have a right to believe that as the Government recast its defence doctrine priority would be assigned to the defence of the resources rich north-west in particular. It is the Pilbara which is likely to be the object of the attention of any enemy in our region that wishes to harm us short of outright invasion. It is also the Pilbara iron ore trade, conducted through the narrow waterways of the eastern Indian Ocean, which is likely to be the object of any harassment of our shipping, at least at the level we can deal with from within our own resources.

So to us in Western Australia, promises of improved staging facilities on the west coast, of patrol boat bases in the north-west to cover the Cockburn Sound-Darwin gap, improvement of facilities at Learmonth and a joint training area at Yampi, a project announced incidentally by the previous Labor Government – all of which were contained in the 1976 White Paper – were very important. So too were undertakings to improve the

capacities of Australian forces to move rapidly across the continent.

I would also advocate that real defence self-reliance requires the permanent basing of some aircraft with a strike capability in Western Australia and of a significant portion of Australia's submarine force. Yet we must also be aware that not much of this is off the drawing board. A lot of it can be readily shuffled to the bottom of the pile of priorities. As long as the Government's commitment to the defence self-reliance concept endures, there remains a reasonable expectation that the strategic needs of Western Australia will be met, even if, as happened with much of what was announced in the White Paper, the schedule is dropped back three to five years. However, recent Government pronouncements, including the one made today, raise questions about the wholeheartedness to the Government's commitments to self-reliance. The background of the relevant members of this Government locates their initial parliamentary and ministerial experience in the heyday of mis-conceived forward defence strategies. Some of our service and civilian defence advisers hanker after the days when it was easier and more interesting to co-operate with their equivalent allied services rather than with each other.

The changes in command structure which would end these tendencies have not occurred even though the Department of Defence was appropriately restructured under the Labor Government. What we risk in Western Australia is that as the Government reappraises relations with regional allies and the United States, costs involved will preclude necessary attention to Western Australia's needs. On 18 September last the Prime Minister announced that large multinational exercises involving Australian forces were to be revived under the five-power defence arrangement. In early October there was a further announcement of increased defence co-operation with Thailand. A co-operative venture with the United States took place in the Indian Ocean during the election campaign. I do think that the announcement of the decision by the Government to place Orion aircraft at Butterworth is an example of the problems

that we face. Honourable members would be aware that the Orion aircraft are capable of carrying weapons to strike aircraft and it is precisely that sort of aircraft which I feel needs a permanent station in Western Australia. They are to be deployed at Butterworth which is given priority over Western Australian needs. This is the problem that we will confront in Western Australia as the Government in fact, if not in principle, tampers with the notion of defence self-reliance.

We not only risk in Western Australia the denial of essential defence resources but also we risk the cost of misconceived cover operations. The offers for the permanent basing of allied warships in Cockburn Sound is one such case. It can cover, politically, and I believe it does, a government unwillingness to fully utilise the facility with Australian resources. However in an unstable international environment, where both super-powers but particularly the United States, have strategic doctrines which encompass limited nuclear war it makes a major Australian metropolitan area for the first time a near certain nuclear target, if a nuclear attack occurs. In both its political and strategic aspects the Government's offer contributes to the 'de-defence' of Western Australia. The Government's conception of the Western alliance, on which a lot of its tampering with the notion of defence self-reliance is based, is outdated. Disunity within the Western alliance is not simply a product of a lack of American will. It represents unalterable changes from the 1950s in the strategic balance and in the Western economy. The allies of the United States economically, at least, are now often its competitors. That fact in the relationship of the allies with the United States can on a day-to-day basis often outweigh their common commitment on strategic issues. They are particularly competitors for access to key resources such as oil.

The implications of these changes cannot be avoided by Australians. One small aspect of this, I believe, confronted us recently in Australian politics in a way that made obvious the fact that we cannot continue the sort of automatic knee-jerk commitment to alliance

friendships as we have in the past. Evidently our forces exercising with Americans in the northern Indian Ocean a couple of months ago did not proceed beyond Sri Lanka to join their allies in key areas of the Arabian Sea. Behind that amendment to the Government's new forward policy, I believe we can detect the hand of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr Anthony) and the Foreign Minister (Mr Street); in particular the Deputy Prime Minister because he has stressed Australia's economic relations with the Gulf. He knows the possible economic consequences in that area to Australia - a most important future trading area - if we are not perceived as a nation which takes its national sovereignty seriously.

In the way I believe we have misconstrued the Western alliance and have not fully appreciated its proper historical perspective. I also feel that we have too readily buried the question of detente and the advantage that detente has been to the West in permitting the alliance to make essential re-adjustments to its own internal power balance in the 1960s, Also we have failed to appreciate the extent to which detente has permitted the West unconsciously - not necessarily consciously - to subvert Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. No-where is this more evident than has been the case with those most encouraging, if tenuous gains made by the Polish workers. Trade with the West and associated Polish indebtedness, which now stands at \$8 billion to the West - more than any other European State - has helped produce economic conditions which have given the democratic movement in Poland a mass base. The experience of co-operation with the West and the Polish Government's need for Western credit is a factor in that country's willingness to negotiate with the Polish workers movement. That fact has been a product of detente, which unfortunately I believe to a degree has been prematurely buried. A residual and diminishing concern for the Soviet Union in preventing its intervention is the hostility of the West with the possible loss to the Soviet Union of economic benefits gained during detente. Whatever happens in Poland, we must not permit any outside intervention to reverse

those developments without the most vigorous and practical protests. The international origins of these changes ought not to be forgotten.

I have a family background which encourages me to see this Parliament as a great Australian institution. I was taught by my father, who was a member of this Parliament for 32 years, to love its forms and possibilities. I feel it a great privilege to be a member of what ought to be the focal point of Australian democracy. I am aware that the power and functions of this Parliament over the years have gradually and not always consciously been whittled away by the exercise of executive power. I believe that we are starting slowly to whittle back – we have done it much more rapidly in the Senate – that encroachment on the authority of Parliament via the committee system. It is a system worth protecting and taking very seriously. I am very grateful to my colleagues for having appointed me to two parliamentary committees. I understand that there are many honourable members on both sides of this House who are determined to reverse the process of executive whittling away of parliamentary authority. I hope that in the coming years they will treat me as a friend.