



David Bartlett MP

House of Assembly

Date: 20 April 2004

Electorate: Denison

FORMER PREMIER, MR JIM BACON

Mr LENNON (Franklin - Premier - Motion) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House –

(1) Places on record its deep appreciation to the former Premier, Jim Bacon, for his outstanding contribution to the Tasmanian people as a member of Parliament from 1996 until 2004, as Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party from 1997 to 2004 and as Premier of the State from 1998 to 2004.

(2) Pays tribute to a great Tasmanian and wishes him and his wife, Honey, the very best for the future.

Mr Speaker, at the outset I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Tasmanian Greens for agreeing to allow David Bartlett to speak at the end of my contribution and, of course, it will be his maiden speech in this House.

Mr SPEAKER - The honourable member for Denison, Mr Bartlett, on his inaugural speech.

[3.38 p.m.]

Mr BARTLETT (Denison - Inaugural) - Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thanks to the two Leaders of the opposition parties for their indulgence and the indulgence of my family and friends who are waiting patiently in the Gallery.

Mr Speaker, it is of course with mixed feelings that I rise today to deliver my inaugural speech. Each of us here who have aspired to a seat in this House have probably anticipated this moment and savoured it when it has arrived, however it would be remiss of me not to pause to reflect on my path here and the unfortunate circumstances that have undoubtedly led to this moment. None of us want to benefit from another's misfortune and least of all the misfortune of our friends and mentors. In preparing this speech I have thought a lot about Jim and his wife, Honey, as they face the battle ahead. I wanted to start my speech by wishing them strength and peace for the future before I talk more about Jim.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to start by acknowledging in the Reserve my wife, Larissa. Larissa is not only my wife but also my best friend and partner in everything we do. She deserves all my thanks for her strength and wonderful spirit of adventure that has enabled me to get here. I also take the opportunity to acknowledge my friends and family in the Gallery today. I also want to take the opportunity to thank all those

Inaugural Speech – David Bartlett MP

who supported me during the 2002 election campaign: the tireless workers, the advisers, the supporters and the resource providers. There are far too many to mention them all by name here today so I will not.

Following the 2002 election I was of course disappointed to miss out narrowly on a seat. My father had always told me as I was growing up that the Hare-Clark was the fairest electoral system in the world. Sitting at the end of a dozen spreadsheets and 20 scrutineers' reports for two weeks, watching and waiting, did not seem that fair at the time but in missing out I was pleased to see the Hare-Clark system delivered a bright new crop of Tasmanian politicians on all sides at the last election. For example, despite my disappointment, I was still very pleased to see the members for Franklin, Will Hodgman, Nick McKim and Lara Giddings get seats because of the new ideas that I thought their personal campaigns embraced. I believe they will be the leaders of the future.

I chose my political colours rather than being born into them. Although I grew up in a big family which invariably had political opinions, I have always been a student of Tasmanian politics. I am not sure a light on the hill appeared for me, as it were, until second year university. Unlike many of my Labor colleagues from a - maybe I should not use this word - previous generation, I cannot and will not claim the Whitlam dismissal as a punctuation mark in my political thinking. In 1975 I was seven years old, and my only political contact in that year was a kindly, apparently elderly gentleman, giving me a sticker outside the local primary school on polling day. I promptly took the sticker home –

Mr Whiteley interjecting.

Mr BARTLETT - I think this is the one time in your political career you have to be quiet, Mr Whiteley.

Members laughing.

Mr BARTLETT - I took the sticker home and dutifully put it on my bedroom door. I then promptly spent the next three days trying to get every last shred of it off after my father hit the roof with rage. To this day I am not sure; I guess my father's rage was more to do with the damaged paintwork than the fact the kindly old gentleman's name on the sticker was none other than the current member for Denison, and Her Majesty's loyal shadow attorney-general for the Liberal Opposition, Mr Michael Hodgman.

Members laughing.

Mr BARTLETT - I guess everything is relative because I am now 36 years old and I still think of the member for Denison as a kindly elderly gentleman –

Members laughing.

Mr BARTLETT - but I will not be putting any of your stickers up next election, if that is all right with you, Michael.

Inaugural Speech – David Bartlett MP

Mr Speaker, my political road to Damascus experience was one night in Ulverstone in 1989. I was in Ulverstone working on the school and college access program, a program that encouraged regionally based young Tasmanians to consider university as an option for their future. The program was run by a leading Tasmanian educator, Graeme Foster, and I just happened to be sitting in the front bar at Turner's Hotel with him and Age football journalist and writer, Martin Flannagan, when the news broke that Edmund Rouse had been arrested for attempted bribery of a member of parliament. The rest, as they say, is history, and with due regard for my PLP colleague, the member for Bass, I will not speak about the details of the fallout of that moment in Tasmanian history today. Suffice to say that the conversation that night over a few beers with Graeme and Martin traversed a wide-ranging landscape of Tasmanian social and political history.

The conclusions I drew were these. It is this side of politics that has driven the great social and economic changes throughout Tasmanian history. It is this side of politics where the passion, the colour, the movement and the commitment reside. It is this side of politics that is values-driven and built upon commitment to equity of opportunity for all, and it is this side of politics that has delivered and continues to deliver the great progressive thinkers and doers throughout Tasmanian history.

Just as the Whitlam dismissal galvanised a generation of Australians in their political thinking, I think the Rouse bribery scandal in those times I believe will serve as a political punctuation mark in the thinking of all Tasmanians. Those events will emerge in history as a moment when progressive Tasmanians recognised certain dark forces at work in our community, and hopefully started on a path to sideline them forever.

Mr Speaker, to carry on a metaphor that one of the media advisers said to me this morning was wearing a bit thin, upon his election to Parliament a political hero of mine was asked what he was going to do now. He chose to quote Bob Dillon in saying, 'I'm going to learn my song before I sing it'. I figured I would trot out the metaphor one more time, but promise never to use it subsequently, but that is exactly how I feel at this time. None of us here really starts as a blank score, though, as we enter the Parliament; there is a long history of songs that have been sung to us that we bring to this place as a foundation for our own performance. Those songs, of course, come in the form of people in our personal and wider histories; people who develop our ideas, people who inspire and mentor us, and people who shape our values. They are our parents, our families, our friends, and of course our political and professional mentors, and, as a proud product of a quality Tasmanian and wholly public education, I would also include at the very top of this list, our teachers.

I want to talk today not about myself, but about these people, the people I have known and the people whom I have studied who have provided me with the foundation for what I hopefully bring here, and of course Jim Bacon is one of those. I wanted to title this speech, if it is appropriate to do so, 'Standing on the Shoulders of Giants', because that is also how I feel as I enter this House.

I have been fortunate enough to have studied and known some of the giants of Tasmanian political history and I want to not only take something from each of them but also build on a legacy they have left. In entering this place I know I have achieved

Inaugural Speech – David Bartlett MP

nothing more than the opportunity to stand on their shoulders. In endeavouring to learn from each of them, to take with me their best qualities and add them to my own, I recognise I am here only to make a contribution to the foundations that have been laid by those who have come before me.

If over the time I have in this place my contribution amounts to a fraction of what these people have given I will have achieved more than most and more than I can probably hope for. These are people who have lit a light on the hill for me; they are local, they were and are passionate Tasmanians, they individually and collectively made a contribution to this State that I am in awe of.

Journalist, newspaper editor and farmer, Edmund Dwyer-Gray was first elected to the Tasmanian Parliament in 1928. He could be described very much as a Labor larrikin who brought with him to the Parliament some largely radical ideas such as the concept of Douglasite social credit. However, history recognises him as the Treasurer who brought home the bacon for the Ogilvie Labor Government of the day.

It was the time at which Tasmanian Joe Lyons, on the advice of notable Tasmanian economist, L.F. Giblin, was establishing the first Commonwealth grants commission. The new Prime Minister was advised by Giblin, being lobbied hard by Dwyer-Gray behind the scenes, to look for a way to provide a permanent solution to the problems of small States like Tasmania. While Dwyer-Gray's *The Voice* newspaper attacked the new grants institution, it also paved the way for him as the Treasurer to bring post-depression financial security to Tasmania, which in turn allowed Ogilvie to press on with the restoration of public service salaries, the Tarraleah hydro-electric development and the modernisation of hospitals in Hobart and Launceston.

Dwyer-Gray's passion for the fight on behalf of Tasmania and his ability to find pragmatic financial solutions to the many and varied problems he saw for setting the working classes of the time put him, in my opinion, in the group of the three most catalytic treasurers this State has ever had.

Roy Fagan was the PLP's primary intellectual driver as well as its conscience from 1946 to 1974. His political conviction grew from experience as a barrister representing farm workers in the midlands of Tasmania. He developed a strong sense of injustice because of the way in which farm workers were dealt with by landowners - treated like serfs, often paid in kind, these people often came to Roy Fagan for legal advice. Fagan regarded his greatest achievement in politics as the abolition of capital punishment. Due to the conservatism of the Legislative Council at the time, the reform was rejected in the upper House 12 times before Roy Fagan was successful on the thirteenth.

There is no doubt that Fagan was motivated by the highest ideals. In a letter to his son, of which I have a full copy but I will not read the whole, in 1973 upon his promotion he advised that 'in those who wish to apply their intellect, exercise their gifts and fulfil themselves, the acceptance of responsibility is what life is all about'. If I could aspire to just a portion of the tenacity, decency and sense of justice that Roy Fagan brought to this place, I will indeed achieve much.

Inaugural Speech – David Bartlett MP

I was fortunate to have known Bill Neilson in his retirement from politics. As a 14 year old I met Bill through his pastime of theatre and he would pick me up and take me home from rehearsals at the Playhouse. I am pleased to be able to personally vouch that Bill Neilson was a kind and caring man. It was this contact that led me to study his time as Premier more closely.

Neilson assumed the premiership in 1975 and could probably have not taken office at a worse moment. In January the Lake Illawarra struck Hobart's Tasman Bridge and severed the growing eastern suburbs. While Neilson was probably not recognised as a great economic reformer as Premier, surely it was his awarding of contracts to Bob Clifford at that time that has, in time, led to one of Tasmania's great economic success stories. If his contribution to economic policy was on the lighter side, his lasting contribution to education and the arts in Tasmania was immeasurable. Neilson gave seven warehouses, which were formerly Education department stores and before that apple packing sheds, to the arts community. This became the Salamanca Arts Centre. His vision was contrary to many in the community at the time who wanted the area demolished and redeveloped.

This move started the Salamanca Market and the rest is history; in one visionary move Neilson created a heart and centre for the emerging art and craft industries that continue to thrive today. Neilson was also a social progressive and demonstrated this with the appointment, amongst other things, of Kim Boyer as the first-ever women's adviser to a Premier in Tasmania.

I understand that on his deathbed he spoke of his proudest achievement which was that he led the Labor Party to victory in Tasmania less than a year after Whitlam was decimated at the poll, when Tasmania went from having five Federal Labor seats to none. Bill Neilson was a premier with vision and perhaps, before his time, recognised the significant importance of the education and arts in a modern economy.

Another premier and giant of Tasmanian political history I have been fortunate enough to know is Michael Field. Field was Premier of Tasmania from 1989 to 1992, during a period of cataclysmic and, I believe, the most significant political changes in my lifetime. Perhaps it was his work in holding the Treasury portfolio during this time that will be written in history as his greatest contribution.

In 1984 Tasmania received about \$280 million in Franklin dam compensation. However, in a familiar pattern - familiar to me now - the State faced similar-sized cuts in its general purpose payment and special purpose payments over the next ten years. Interest payments fuelled by the big-spending Gray Government had risen from \$186 million in 1984 to \$330 million in 1989. General government net debt had grown from \$2.2 billion to \$3.6 billion in the corresponding time period.

On the economic front, by 1990 new investment in Tasmania was down by 10.2 per cent against an 8.4 per cent increase in other States. In short, Tasmania's basket-case economy was headed for the brick wall of a State financial debt crisis.

'Tricky Micky', as he was unfortunately dubbed, took his budget message around the State with his now famous slide show but voters - and some of my other

Inaugural Speech – David Bartlett MP

Parliamentary Labor Party colleagues here today - threw him out in 1992, when Labor's vote hit a record low of 29 per cent.

Field once gave me some personal advice. To effect positive change, he said, all you need to do is take small acts of personal courage. Amongst all the advice that Michael has given me over the years this is the gem that stays with me, and I think it says more about him than any other. While I think Field would have preferred to have mapped out his political career as a social reformer, it will be significant acts of personal courage in the face of great financial and social turmoil that history will write as his greatest achievement.

Labor history says that David Crean's father once said to him as a boy, 'Understand a budget and you will understand government'. It seems to me the young David Crean took this bit of advice to heart, because never in recent times - and I know members will agree - has a Treasurer been so completely a technical master of his portfolio.

I consider it a great honour to have worked for nearly two years for Crean, who as part of a strong Labor Government Cabinet at the time - even though it was only eight weeks ago - proved once and for all that a serious, studied and strategic approach to State finances can result in a rapid and significant improvement in government services. He has also showed that a strategic approach to the application of those finances can, particularly in a relatively small economy like Tasmania's, have an impact on the performance and growth of that economy.

His achievements, I believe, will be that much more applauded by history because not only did he achieve these financial results but he did it in the context of setting and largely achieving a goal of Tasmania being debt-free by 2008. If Field turned the financial corner, Crean as Treasurer set a course for the future through the fiscal plan that has affected all Tasmanian lives.

Crean's volumes of valuable advice to me have included to always make sure you know more than your opponents, knuckle down, specialise and learn. Crean's dedication to detail, capacity for enormous workloads and good decision-making, coupled with his devastating logic and parliamentary skills, will, I believe, also place him in history as a Tasmanian great.

Mr Speaker, you will note that this particular list so far of Tasmanian political greats does not include any women. I would ask the members, however, not to judge me for that but perhaps to judge the past, where it was perhaps harder for undoubtedly talented women to make their mark. I am pleased to say that my list of Tasmanian parliamentary greats does include women but am a little embarrassed to say they are mostly in the House today.

Of course, history will show that the contributions of Paula Wriedt in overseeing the development of a world-class education system in Tasmania, and Judy Jackson in the achievement of Australia's most progressive social changes, were as significant as any of those who have come before them.

It may surprise some members that I first came face to face with Jim Bacon as recently as in 1998. I was a manager of a branch in the Department of Health when

Inaugural Speech – David Bartlett MP

the Government changed. The newly-elected Premier invited around 500 of Tasmania's senior public servants to a speech at the Hotel Grand Chancellor. On that day I listened to a man who was able to draw together a range of social and economic policy ideas into coherent speech to articulate a real vision for Tasmania. I had only recently returned from work in Melbourne and was excited to hear someone articulate a grand plan, new ideas and a way ahead for the home that I love so much. I recall saying to a colleague on the way out of the hall, 'Now there's a man I'd like to work for'. As fortune would have it, I had the great pleasure to work in various capacities for Jim Bacon from early 1999 through to his recent retirement. It is both humbling and awesome to now be taking his seat in Parliament.

What of the vision that he outlined so clearly that day in late 1998? It is a great pleasure to conclude my speech today by talking briefly about the remarkable turnaround in Tasmania since that time, brought about by a partnership by the Bacon-led Labor Government and the people of Tasmania. It is this turnaround, so evident to all Tasmanians, that places Jim Bacon in the pantheon of greats who have come before him, some of whom I have talked about today. It is a remarkable turnaround, both economically and socially.

During most of the 1990s the national economy grew at around 4 per cent per annum, while Tasmania put in its worst economic performance ever. That national economy continues to grow and now so too does Tasmania. Who would have thought just a few years ago that a new member could be standing in this House welcoming a Tasmanian unemployment rate of 6.7 per cent? Who would have thought just a few years ago that any new member could be standing in this House welcoming job growth in Tasmania at three times higher than the nation's? At the same time, the number of unemployed has dropped in Tasmania faster than anywhere else in the nation and is now at the lowest level in over 20 years. This is one of Jim Bacon's Government's greatest achievements.

Over the last four years total spending in Tasmania has equalled the nation's and this is the first time this has occurred on record. Edmund Dwyer-Gray would be thrilled to know we have finally achieved one of his aims. This record level of spending has been underpinned by demand at most levels not seen before in this State and accelerated by record numbers of tourists who are enjoying increased access to Tasmania by the new ferries and more domestic flights. This level of demand is also underpinned by a growing population, at its highest level ever. Exports at around \$2.5 billion are at record levels; private investment at around \$2 billion, again at record levels; and the number of dwelling units approved growing faster than anywhere else in the nation over the last 12 months.

But the Bacon-led Labor Government was not just about a booming economy; it was also about how quality financial management could deliver better social outcomes for all Tasmanians. With over \$146 million in extra funds going into Education over the last five years, the State is now within reach of the Learning Together goals of a world-class education system. An extra \$200 million going into Health is also, of course, a far cry from previous governments.

Mr Bacon's time as Premier also oversaw the enactment of the nation's best antidiscrimination legislation and Australia's most progressive relationship laws. Of

Inaugural Speech – David Bartlett MP

course, Bacon's vision and achievements for the tourism industry and the development of arts and creative industries can be measured against any of his predecessors. Bacon's premiership also oversaw the development of the largest and, importantly, the most diverse range of infrastructure projects in the State's history. These are real projects whose benefits have not yet been fully felt in the community or the economy.

Through comprehensive programs such as Tasmania Together and local government partnerships, for the first time in history Tasmanians are shaking off the old parochial chains and looking forward to working cooperatively for positive change. Most importantly, one of the hallmarks of the Bacon Government was a strong, talented and united Cabinet and parliamentary party. While he will, of course, be missed, the equally strong and talented party he leaves behind continues to recognise there are still too many Tasmanians who are not sharing the rewards of a growing economy. I am confident that this Lennon-led Labor Government will continue to work hard to ensure more Tasmanians can enjoy this remarkable recovery.

Mr Speaker, as I said at the start of this speech, if over the time I have in this place my contribution amounts to a fraction of what these people, particularly Jim Bacon, have given, I will have achieved more than most. I will endeavour to learn from each of them, to take with me their best qualities and add them to my own. What of my own qualities? I do not know, but I have this idea - it is actually an old leftist idea that I think Dwyer-Gray would have subscribed to and that Jim Bacon certainly did - and that is people should not be considered as mere consumers but inherently as producers and creators. If we can provide an environment in which the creative and innovative skills present in every Tasmanian are unlocked through our education system, through our social and economic environment, through our diversity and development of talent, if we can provide that environment we will have unlocked the massive, creative and productive strength of 500 000 people and we will be truly moving into a golden and great period of Tasmanian history.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, 'The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams'. I believe the future belongs to Tasmania and with that, I heartily support the motion.

Members - Hear, hear.

Applause from Galley