

## Inaugural Speech – Hon. Judy Jackson MHA



Hon. Judy Jackson MHA

House of Assembly

Date: 19 March 1986

Electorate: Denison

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### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

**Mrs JACKSON** (Denison) - Mr Speaker, while I rise to follow the historic tradition of this House of making my 'maiden' speech I would like the House to recognise that I am a woman and, in defiance of that anachronism, this should be known as my 'first' speech.

I thank the electors of Denison for electing me to this House and I appreciate that they have expressed a faith in my ability to represent their interests. There is within the electorate a change in the way women's role in society is being perceived and more women are becoming interested in politics and other issues which affect their lives and expressing their opinions on these issues. Instead of being instruction takers they are now becoming decision makers.

I joined the Australian Labor Party at 17 years of age and I was politicised by the tragedy of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war. During that war the Australian Labor Party showed that it was prepared to make a stand on a principle, no matter how unpopular, and history has vindicated that principled stand. Those years of my first direct involvement in politics were very impressionable years in my personal development and, at that time, the political ideals and values with which I had grown up were consolidated.

One of the basic tenets of the Australian Labor Party, as with all socialist democratic parties, is that governments must be prepared to intervene to ensure that there are job opportunities for all men and women who wish to work. It must be prepared to intervene to make sure there is adequate housing, good health care, an enlightened education system and responsive social services and laws which are relevant to the society's aspirations and values. History has shown us that when these basic needs of a modern society are left to the free market forces they rarely become a reality for the majority of people. It is this majority of men, women and children who do not possess wealth or privilege - and who need not even aspire to wealth or privilege - for whom the Labor Party in Australia has traditionally shown its concern and for whom its programs and policies have been formulated. As a Party and individually we will do our best to protect the people of Tasmania who do not have wealth and privilege from the worst excesses and omissions of the Parliament.

During the past four years the Parliament has often failed to show compassion to these people. Our unemployment rate has constantly been the highest in Australia and at the moment one in ten Tasmanians is looking for work and unable to find it. This rate is much higher for young people, women and people in rural areas.

**Mr SPEAKER** - Order. I am sorry to have to interrupt the honourable member's speech but, the time being 11.30 p.m., in accordance with standing order 37A I must put the question -

That the House do now adjourn.

### **ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

#### **Resumed from 18 March 1986 (page 118)**

**Mrs JACKSON** (Denison) -I began my speech yesterday and I would like to continue where I left off. I would reiterate my statement of yesterday that our unemployment rate has constantly been the highest in Australia and at the moment one in ten Tasmanians wanting to work is unable to find a job. This rate is much higher for younger people, women and people in rural areas and it is far too high in a relatively small community such as ours. New initiatives and directions must be found. A total reliance on the established industries in Tasmania will not provide sufficient and secure jobs as we proceed towards the twenty-first century. In his speech on the motion for the Address-in-Reply, the Leader of the Opposition expressed the new directions the Opposition thinks should be taken to provide a broader industrial occupational base for Tasmanians.

There are more than 4 000 people waiting to be housed by the Housing Department and vacancies in private housing are at an all-time low of 0.05 per cent of available housing. Housing is a basic human need and as a parliament we should consider it a number one priority. Hundreds of men, women and their children in Tasmania are presently living in substandard accommodation. They are sleeping on their friends' and relatives' lounge room floors, in run-down boarding houses, in cars, in broken-down outhouses, and even out of doors, because they are unable to acquire adequate and permanent premises. As winter approaches, the plight of these people will become more desperate. Immediate action should be taken by this Parliament to rectify this worsening problem.

Our education system is suffering from cutbacks in teaching and ancillary staff and the neglect of maintenance on our buildings and equipment. As a community we cannot afford to play politics with our children's futures. Our children are our most valuable resource and as a parliament we should do everything possible to nourish and develop that resource. If we fail in this, there will be no future.

Our health care system must be planned to provide efficient and responsive care for all. It is my view, and that of the Labor Party, that preventative health care should be the basis of any government health program. Preventative screening for detecting people at risk of heart disease, cancer, alcoholism and other diseases has already proved effective. We must promote health education in schools with emphasis on physical fitness, nutrition, drug abuse and family planning. We must promote in the wider community awareness of the causes, prevention, early detection and treatment of diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other ailments which cause death or diminish the quality of life.

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To achieve this objective requires a shift in the allocation of resources. Preventative health care should receive more emphasis and financial assistance. The main provider of health care should become multidisciplinary, community-based health facilities, and hospital-based treatment should be available only for acute patient care. I and the Labour Party also believe that public hospitals would be more patient-effective and cost-effective if controlled by a hospital commission headed by administrators who have concern for the overall Tasmanian hospital system. In the past the Parliament has not addressed the problem that over 3 000 people are waiting for elective surgery in our public hospitals and that people are being forced to borrow large sums of money so that they can afford to obtain private medical treatment.

Our nurses are the lowest paid in Australia and this, with other poor working conditions, is contributing to the difficulties in staffing our hospitals. There is still considerable unrest in our health services which needs to be resolved. A career and pay structure which will give the correct remuneration for the responsibilities and duties undertaken by nursing staff should be supported. We have been obtaining our nurses on the cheap for far too long. The problem of providing child-care, car parking, retraining programs and part-time work must be addressed and resolved urgently, to attract nurses back into their profession.

All these are areas which past Labor governments in Tasmania have prided themselves on developing and maintaining to a very high standard. These are areas of government activity which still remain the most important for the well-being of the majority of men, women and children in Tasmania.

For a society and a community to develop its full potential, all its members must be free and able to contribute. Historically women in Australia have not had the opportunities and freedoms to contribute to the economic, cultural and social development of their country. The barriers faced by women, especially in the employment area and to a lesser extent in other areas, such as the availability of educational opportunities, the availability of housing, obtaining appropriate health care and proper child-care for their dependent children - are barriers which have developed and remained because of the traditional perception of a woman's role in our society. However people increasingly believe that this perception is erroneous.

I stood for Parliament at this time because I believe issues which particularly concern women and their families are not receiving enough consideration and action from the Tasmanian Parliament. In other States and federally, parliaments over the past decade have designed and implemented programs to increase women's participation in the economic life of Australia. I would like Tasmanians to be able to participate in the new initiatives.

In 1947, women made up 22 per cent of the work force and now in 1986 they make up 38 per cent of the total work force. This growth in women's employment since World War II has been caused by a change in both the demand and supply factors of labour. There has been an increase in demand generated by industrial expansion and economic growth. The enormous growth in women's employment has not been related to any concept of a woman's right to work or gender equity in the work force - and this goes some way to explaining why there has been little change in women's overall status. In Australia, women comprise 81.5 per cent of the labour force engaged in the

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four occupational groupings of clerical, sales, service and professional and technical, which mainly includes teaching and nursing. In a recent - 1985 - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development study on employment, Australia was shown to have the most sex-segregated labour force of any member country. For example, in Australia 1 per cent of our engineers are women; in the United Kingdom, 10 per cent are women; and in France 16 per cent are women. In these four occupational groupings, 72 per cent of the total work force are women. There is a lack of movement across industries suggesting that the sexual stereotyping of occupations is deeply embedded in the Australian labour market.

As well as the demand factor, significant supply factors have been important in the growth of women's employment. Since World War II there has been a tendency to younger marriages and smaller families. This has meant there has been an increase in the number of years in which women are relatively free of their family responsibilities. Also the typical nuclear family - a man engaged in paid work with a dependent spouse and one or two children - is declining in reality. Only one in five of Australian families now falls into this category. Many women need to work to escape dependence on low incomes and social security payments. Another supply factor has been the increasing number of women attaining higher levels of educational training.

The gender segregation in the work force has made it very difficult for the 1969 judgment of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission of equal pay for equal work to be realised. In 1985 the ratio of male to female earnings was 79 per cent and if part-time earnings are taken into account the difference is even larger. In November 1985 female weekly earnings for both full and part-time earnings were only 65 per cent of male earnings. Equal pay legislation cannot redress the earnings gap between men and women because male dominated occupations are better remunerated. This can be starkly illustrated by salary differentials between nurses and doctors, or teachers and university staff, or even shop assistants, car salesmen and real estate agents. After all what is the fundamental difference in selling a television or stove and selling a car or a house - but the remuneration is much greater for the latter.

For the past ten years all Australian governments except Queensland and Tasmania have made legislative provisions to assist in improving women's labour status. In 1975 South Australia was the first Government to introduce sex discrimination legislation and it has since been followed by New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria, and the Federal Parliament in August 1984. These acts cover unlawful discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status and pregnancy, and they also make sexual harassment in education and employment unlawful.

All governments in Australia, again except for Queensland and Tasmania, have adopted equal employment opportunity policies in relation to their own employees. The most controversial legislation providing equal opportunities to women in the labour force has just been introduced into the Federal Parliament - the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Bill 1986 - which will eventually cover all private sector companies with more than 100 staff, all higher educational institutions and all Australian government employees.

In its discussion paper in May 1984, the Federal Government defined 'affirmative action' as:

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'a systematic means, determined by the employer in consultation with senior management, employees and unions, of achieving equal employment opportunity (EEO) for women. Affirmative action is compatible with appointment and promotion on the basis of the principle of merit, skills and qualifications. It does not mean that women will be given preference over better qualified men; it does mean that men may expect to face stiffer competition for jobs. This is not discrimination.'

The broad acceptance of this legislation by the Australian business community, after 28 large companies participated in pilot programs, is not because these companies were concerned about giving women a happy and fulfilling life but because it makes economic sense. Many other countries overseas have adopted affirmative action programs in employment for the same reasons.

A community cannot afford to under-utilise half its population resource. The Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, said - in his second reading speech on the affirmative action bill on 19 February 1986 - that neither individual employers nor the nation can afford to waste the valuable contributions which women can and do make to our economy.

Unfortunately Tasmania has great and deep-seated economic problems. During the past four years we have constantly had the highest unemployment rate in Australia. We must develop new and innovative economic programs for the future of Tasmania. Tasmania cannot afford in its present economic climate not to use its whole population resource. The Tasmanian Parliament must give positive encouragement to the whole population to participate fully in our economic development. It may not be the only reason, but the observation must be made that the two States with the constantly highest rates of unemployment in Australia are Tasmania and Queensland, and they are the only two States which have not thought it necessary to pass legislation to promote equal opportunities for women in the work force.

To assist in achieving this objective the Parliament needs to appoint equal opportunities officers in the public service and to encourage their employment in the private sector. We need sex discrimination legislation so women have the freedom to compete equally for jobs, finance, education and housing. Tasmania needs an affirmative action program and legislation for equal employment opportunities for women in the public and private sectors.

By its actions and legislation, the Tasmanian Parliament should defend and promote the aspirations and lifestyle of all Tasmanians. The Parliament must recognise the urgent need to reform the law on rape and sexual assault with the necessary support and counselling services to make the legislation effective. This is one of the most glaring examples where the law reflects the nineteenth-century attitude - or even earlier - of society to women. It permits a man to rape his wife and mentions the seduction of heiresses for lucre. It gives inadequate protection to young males and females from sexual assault and there is evidence that this is historically based on the nineteenth-century concept that a master had certain rights of sexual access to his servants.

The Australian Labor Party took positive steps several years ago to encourage women to join the Party and to give them positions of responsibility within its organisation. A program of affirmative action was initiated whereby one-third of all elected positions

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within the party had to be filled by women. I felt encouraged to stand for a policy committee for the first time as a direct consequence of this policy and I was elected because the rules of affirmative action applied. Although I have been a member of the Party for many years, I had never had the time - and possibly the inclination, because of family commitments - to develop the skills and experience to get the numbers. I certainly know now, and in subsequent forays into the numbers game I have not needed affirmative action. But I will always acknowledge the importance of that initial support.

The women elected to the policy committees and other positions have assisted in developing policies and issues which are of particular concern to women and those have assisted in making the Party more responsive and more attractive to this section of the community. The Australian Labor Party adopted this course of action because it made political sense. It realised that it could not afford to waste the talents of women by utilising them only to make afternoon teas and jams for the trade table.

On this side of the House 20 per cent of our members are now women. We are beginning to reflect the make-up of the Tasmanian population, where 52 per cent of the population are women. The women sitting on this side of the House want to make a valuable contribution in bringing before the Parliament issues which will raise the status of women and contribute to their achieving a fulfilling life. A framework of understanding and knowledge must be developed so that the community responses are not primitive and basic because of ignorance. All of us have a tendency to make basic human responses to situations we find threatening or are unable to understand.

I have deliberately placed emphasis on issues concerning women in this speech because of the Government's apparent lack of intention to propose any initiatives to assist women in Tasmania during the course of this Parliament. This in itself is the greatest indication that women do not yet have the economic power or networks to make themselves indispensable to the survival of this Government. If women were perceived as having that power, policies and financial allocations would have been made to them as they have been made to the present powerful sectors of the Tasmanian community. As women, all we are asking is for all of us to have equal access to that power.

I support the motion.

**Opposition members** - Hear, hear.