

HON ROBERT HETHERINGTON

Condolence Motion

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [2.03 pm] — without notice: It is with great sadness that I move —

That this house expresses its deep regret at the death of Hon Robert Hetherington, a former member of the Legislative Council for the East Metropolitan Province and the South East Metropolitan Province, and places on record its appreciation for his long public service, and tender its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

I did not know Bob Hetherington all that well, but I certainly did know him. He and his wife, Penny, were part of a group of party members deeply committed to electoral reform, and so I had the opportunity to meet him on several occasions. He was born in Mt Gambier, South Australia, in 1923, and he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force at the age of 18 and saw active service in New Guinea and Morotai Island in Indonesia. During his service, he rose to the rank of sergeant. On his return he went to the University of Adelaide and received an honours degree in history and political science in 1951. That same year, he married the then Penny Loveday, who herself went on to become a distinguished writer and historian.

From a young age Bob was a passionate advocate for social change. One of the many former members of Parliament to whom I spoke in preparing my notes for this condolence motion told me that Bob had told him that as a teacher not long out of university he was called into the principal's office to be told by the principal, "Your colleagues are saying that the way you are talking you must be a commo, but I know that no returned man could be, so we'll take it no further." In fact, Bob Hetherington thought that both the Communist Party and the Catholic Church exercised intellectual tyranny over their supporters. What he valued was the debate and the testing of ideas, and he encouraged his students to challenge and debate what they were being taught. When he was a lecturer and a tutor at the University of South Australia, the then acting head of department and the person who offered him the position was one Leo Blair, who at the time had a four-year-old son called Tony who went on to achieve a few things himself.

As a university academic here in Western Australia, teaching political science, one of his former students, Hon John Cowdell, fondly remembers him as being at the forefront of political debate and practical application of real social change. Deeply committed to true democracy, he was driven to strive for electoral reform and long campaigned for the end to the gerrymander in the Legislative Council. His knowledge of the Westminster system and electoral history was unparalleled. I am advised that he was the only man at the inaugural meeting of the Women's Electoral Lobby. He was instrumental in the establishment of the then Sexual Assault Referral Centre, he was an active campaigner for abortion law reform and he moved a private member's bill to decriminalise homosexuality. He advocated for the inclusion in and improved education for children with disabilities. He described himself as a parliamentarian rather than a politician, and he was an active member and supported the integrity of the committee system for reviewing legislation. However, he was not precious about some of the Parliament's traditions, Mr President, and this quote from *Hansard* details one of the things he had to say about that —

We hear a great deal about the dignity of Parliament, and we have formalities and ceremonies. I am surprised when I hear about dignity because you, Mr President, sit there wearing, on your head, a wig which is a stylised form of the mark of the rake of the 17th century ... The full-bottomed wig was introduced into England by Charles II. As a matter of fact, with all due respect to you, Sir, I may call you a walking anachronism, because you have a 17th century wig over 18th century ruffles and underneath that you have a 13th or 14th century cassock. So, if that is tradition, I think it is time we did away with much of this tradition and, it may be, we should do away with the Westminster tradition of an upper House.

He did, though, value his relationships across the chamber, and he had fondness in particular for Hon Sandy Lewis. This is what he had to say about him —

Mr President, to make sure that the member is here while I am saying it, I will start off with something that I intended to say later. Hon Sandy Lewis, who has just resumed his seat, was the secretary of the Liberal Party when I became the secretary of the Labor Party, and is one of the very few people in this Parliament to whom I turn for advice, and whom I trust implicitly. It is perhaps an odd thing for somebody on the other side of the House to say, but I have always found Sandy Lewis helpful and trustworthy and I would trust him with my life. Certainly his advice has always been valuable and I have valued him as a member who has always worked for the good of all members in this Parliament, both on the House Committee and in assisting the tribunal. I have been fortunate in knowing him. I can

almost say that the first time I really encountered him was when I was on the other side of the House, making my second speech. I did not think I liked him at all, but one learns to adjust.

Mr President, Hon Bob Hetherington served the Australian Labor Party well and was secretary of the state Parliamentary Labor Party from 1983 to 1989. According to *Hansard*, in 1979 he had this to say on the notion of reform and the idea that disagreement and dissent is some kind of weakness —

... the Labor Party attracts reformers of all sorts. Sometimes we might be a little embarrassed by some of them. But where else do reformers go other than to the reform party in Western Australia? The Labor Party is the reform party, the party of concern, and the party of equality. In fact, in my opinion despite its ups and downs it is basically a fine party. That is why I joined it in 1959, coolly and deliberately and after a great deal of thought. We attract all sorts of people to the party, and I do not always go along with everybody within the party on every matter, which is well known because in the Press regularly appear reports of so-called disputes within the party which are supposed to be about to tear it apart. When the day comes that there are not disputes within the party, I will leave it because it will be dead. As long as it is a reform party divisions and arguments will occur and it will be a healthy, democratic party.

Reflecting on his time in the house, he took the view that service to political parties was an important way of serving the state, if not one that was recognised, and he said —

Many people talk as if serving our party is not serving the State, but why do we join political parties? We join them because we believe the particular ... party has the policies which are best for the State. We cannot get together on all matters and work for the good of the State, as some people suggest, because on some matters we believe what the Liberals think is for the good of the State is for the bad of the State, and vice versa. But on some matters there are issues on which we can get together.

In one of his last speeches, he reflected that he hoped that he and Penny could move from their Forrestfield block into the inner city. He hoped that in his nineties he would be able to enjoy inner-city living. He passed away at the age of 92 years. He said this to the Parliament about that —

... when I get too old for my hectare at Forrestfield I would not mind moving to the city. I think it would be a good place to be, particularly as I would be near some good restaurants. At that age, when I am 90, I would enjoy eating at those restaurants and pottering around the city.

He went on to comment —

I hope the proposals I have seen in the newspapers for developing the environs of Parliament House never succeed; I hope better proposals are put forward that do succeed; I hope our city can save some of the bits that are still interesting and develop other interesting bits, and that in the future the city planners take notice of the needs of people to walk through the streets and live in an alive city instead of a city which looks something like a series of dead monuments to business.

When Hon Bob Hetherington was recruited to stand for Parliament for the ALP it was seen as a coup, such was the high regard that he had achieved as an academic and a policy intellectual. That high regard was reflected in him being made Deputy Leader of the Opposition in this chamber when he first entered the Parliament. His action for a better community did not diminish when he left politics; he went on to serve in academia, in the area of mental health and in many other community organisations and activities—always with an eye on electoral reform. I spoke to a number of former members when I was preparing this condolence motion, and the most common description of Bob Hetherington was that he was a decent man.

To his family: to his wife Penny, who I spoke to last week; to his children, Paul, Mark and Naomi and their families; to his grandchildren and to his great grandchild, on behalf of the Western Australia Labor Party, I pass on our deepest condolences and our thanks for letting us share the benefit of his intellect and his commitment to social justice. I commend the motion to the house, Mr President.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [2.12 pm]: Bob Hetherington was born in Mount Gambier, South Australia, on 8 January 1923. As the son of a life assurance representative, he received his primary and secondary education at different country towns, and at Box Hill High School in Melbourne. After working as a junior clerk for H.D. and W.O. Wills, in January 1942, at the age of 19 years, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force and served in Darwin, New Guinea, Morotai and the Moluccas with Advanced Land Headquarters. He was discharged in 1946 with the rank of sergeant. From 1947 he studied at the University of Adelaide, and in 1951 graduated with honours in history and political science. That same year he married Penelope Loveday, whose father, Ron Loveday, later held the Whyalla-based seat in the South Australian House of Assembly from 1956 to 1968, and was a minister from 1965 until his retirement.

After his graduation, Bob Hetherington worked for the Commonwealth Employment Service and was a research scholar at the University of Adelaide. He was then successively a history master at King's College and a senior tutor at the University of Adelaide, before moving to the University of Western Australia in 1967 as a lecturer in politics. For 10 years, until 1977, Bob Hetherington was a mainstay of the UWA Academic Staff Association and the Faculty of Arts, and was highly respected for his lectures on Australian politics. In an era of often sharp political controversy, conservative-leaning students appreciated that Bob was open about his own political allegiance and remained fair minded. They greatly enjoyed informal political discussions with him. He was a major contributor to publications on contemporary electoral history, and his career shows that a PhD need not be a prerequisite for outstanding academic teaching.

Bob Hetherington joined the Australian Labor Party in 1959 and was a member of its South Australian state council and its West Australian state executive. At the May 1974 federal double dissolution election, he was endorsed for the unwinnable sixth position on the ALP Western Australian Senate ticket. At the 1975 federal election, he was advanced to the fifth position that was also to prove unwinnable in a highly adverse political climate. In 1976, however, a redistribution that increased the size of the Legislative Council from 30 to 32 members created a new two-member province known as East Metropolitan. Consisting of the four Legislative Assembly seats of Ascot, Victoria Park, Welshpool and Canning, it stretched from Bayswater to Kenwick. A by-election for a three-year term was held concurrently at the 1977 election with the normal six-year term so that both province seats could be filled. Bob Hetherington was endorsed for the three-year vacancy, running in tandem with the late Fred McKenzie, who had been selected for the six-year term. Opposed by Liberal Party and Independent candidates, he was comfortably elected with an absolute majority of 3 126 or 52.9 per cent of the vote. Three years later, in 1980, he was re-elected for a six-year term in a straight fight with the high-profile Liberal candidate, the late Brian Brand. He enjoyed a majority of nearly 9 000 or 58 per cent of the vote.

His political career was complicated by another major redistribution before the 1983 election that enlarged the Legislative Council to 34 members, created two new urban provinces and abolished the East Metropolitan Province. After the 1983 election, Bob Hetherington was appointed as MLC for the redrawn South East Metropolitan Province, consisting of the seats of Canning, Gosnells, Armadale and Murdoch. The addition of Murdoch made the seat less secure for the ALP than was the East Metropolitan Province, but he was very comfortably re-elected in 1986, with an absolute majority of 8 238 votes—55.1 per cent—against Liberal and Australian Democrat opponents.

In 1977, Bob Hetherington was immediately elected as Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, and was shadow Minister for Education and Electoral Matters, serving in these roles until 1980. From 1983 until 1989, he was the secretary of the Parliamentary Labor Party and served on numerous parliamentary committees. In 1987, following major electoral legislation by the Burke government, the Legislative Council provinces were replaced with the current system of proportional representation, and all 34 MLCs had to face election in 1989. Aged 65, Bob Hetherington did not seek endorsement for a new region and retired from Parliament.

In retirement Bob Hetherington contributed much to the Western Australian community, acknowledged by the award of a Medal in the Order of Australia, in 2004. He tutored in politics at the University of Western Australia, and at Murdoch University from 1993 to 1995 after serving on the Murdoch University Senate from 1990 to 1993. He was a strong advocate for mental health, as president of the Schizophrenia Fellowship of Western Australia from 1992 to 1997 and as a board member of the Western Australia Association for Mental Health from 1996 to 1999.

The government extends its condolences to Mrs Penny Hetherington; to their sons, Paul and Mark; to their daughter, Naomi; and their families.

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [2.18 pm]: I do not have too much more to add to the very eloquent tributes that we have just heard from Hon Sue Ellery, Leader of the Opposition, and Hon Peter Collier, but I do want to make a couple of comments because Bob Hetherington was a very significant figure in the life of the Western Australian Labor Party and his death is a great loss to us all.

There are all sorts of people in Parliament, and they get here for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes they get here by accident: they are a bit surprised to find themselves here. Sometimes they get here because there is really not much else they can do, and they come in here, again, really by accident. Certainly, Bob Hetherington fits into neither of those categories. Bob Hetherington had had a full and distinguished professional life outside the Parliament before he was recruited to come here. As Hon Sue Ellery said, it was regarded as a real coup for the party to have a person of such intellectual stature recruited to our ranks in the upper house. The previous two speakers referred to Bob being an academic, like me, and I am sure that, like me, he was at times referred to as a “bloody academic”. He had a very distinguished career: he was research scholar at the University of Adelaide

in 1952; he was a history master at King's College, Kensington Park, in South Australia from 1953 to 1956; he was a politics tutor at the University of Adelaide from 1957 to 1966; and then of course he came to Western Australia and held the position of lecturer in politics at UWA from 1967 to 1977. As other speakers noted, he continued to contribute to academic life in Western Australia after he retired from this place.

Think about what the times were like when Bob Hetherington walked into this place in 1977. The world was in turmoil—a different sort of turmoil from that which we have now, but if we remember the events in Australia during the first half of the 1970s, and the events in Europe at the end of the 1960s, we can see that people were widely of the view that western society was in some kind of turmoil. There is a direct comparison with the kind of age we live in now. We can all learn from the stance that Bob Hetherington took in these kinds of debates. His view was always that more dialogue was needed; that we needed to talk, not fight; that we needed less confrontation; and that we needed to sit down together and talk about our differences. His message about tolerance, compassion and mutual understanding informs the very best of the Australian Labor Party today.

As previous speakers have indicated, he was a progressive activist on the left of politics, campaigning tirelessly for what in those days was a revolutionary and different way of talking about mental illness. How current is that today, when we are still facing the kind of stigmas that Bob Hetherington hoped we would have moved beyond by the time we got to the twenty-first century? He also campaigned fearlessly for abortion rights and gay law reform. Sadly, things have changed somewhat and these days there seem to be very few advocates on the other side of politics for those kinds of reforms. In those days, one of the things that Bob Hetherington was able to do was forge alliances with more progressive people on the right of politics in this place. This is evident to anyone who ever saw Bob Hetherington in action in this place or in the general political environment in Western Australia.

I did not have the good fortune of serving in this place with Bob. In fact, 1977, when Bob came into this Parliament, was just about the time I arrived in Western Australia from the northern hemisphere. For me, for a long time, the Labor Party was epitomised by people like Bob Hetherington. It was obvious to all of us who grew up with him and looked up to him that fundamentally his belief was in the democratic process. That is what he thought was worth fighting for. He was always driven by his passionate commitment to the three core values of democracy: fairness, equality and justice. He made a very important contribution to this state and to the Australian Labor Party, particularly the Western Australian branch. Our condolences go to Pen, who is also a very esteemed academic, and to all his family.

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [2.23 pm]: I join with members who have spoken before me in passing on my condolences to the Hetherington family, and to formally acknowledge the contribution of Hon Bob Hetherington to this Parliament, to the state of Western Australia, and, as a number of previous speakers have said, most importantly, to the Australian Labor Party. When I first joined the Labor Party, Bob Hetherington was one of those iconic members of Parliament who stood out like a beacon, as someone who was in there for change and to make this society a better place to live in. He was always prepared to challenge the orthodoxies. Although he never achieved the office of minister of the Crown, I suspect that, through his contribution to public life, he achieved much more than many ministers of the Crown. He was clearly someone driven by outcomes, not by seeking popularity or self-promotion. As Hon Sally Talbot said, he sought to convince people with the power of argument. He outlined that very clearly in his first speech to this place. If members want to reflect on who Bob Hetherington was, looking at his inaugural speech to this house gives a good summation of the challenges he saw in this place. In that first speech he said that he wanted to see a greater degree of democracy brought to this place, and he argued for greater use of parliamentary committees. I will quote from his inaugural speech on 2 August 1977 —

I am suggesting—and I will suggest it in greater detail at a later stage—that we must multiply these occasions —

He is referring here to the scrutiny of government —

by developing a decent system of parliamentary committees in this Parliament of ours.

He clearly set out, at a time when this chamber did not have the parliamentary committee system it has now, to try to ensure that there was a greater degree of democracy. He also argued very strongly in his inaugural speech about the need to try to use committees and the Parliament for all of us to work together to find solutions, and to avoid the use of fear as a way of achieving our outcomes, because that leads only to confrontation.

One of the things noted by people who knew Hon Bob Hetherington far better than I did was that he was a public academic. That, they pointed out, is a very great rarity—someone who had gone into public life from academia, and had been prepared to go out there and challenge. His contributions to this place show the forensic analysis of issues that comes from an academically trained mind.

He also took up causes that were not popular at the time. Hon Sally Talbot and Hon Sue Ellery both made reference to this. In particular, he took on the cause of decriminalising homosexuality in this state. Today we might not remember just how controversial this was, and the level of aggression, animosity and personal abuse that people holding those positions took. It would have taken a toll on both Bob Hetherington and his family at the time. It is a very different world, so that when we have a debate about marriage equality today, it does not engender the level of anxiety, animosity and aggression that it did back in the days when Hon Bob Hetherington was taking up those sorts of causes in this place. Some members on both sides would now look back and say that they cannot believe how those debates were conducted. For that, he needs to be continually recognised and honoured as one of the pioneers in that area of human rights in the state of Western Australia.

It is very sad to note Bob Hetherington's recent passing, but he can be very proud of having lived a very full life. He lived by his values, and was able to debate issues without compromising his principles in seeking to achieve his goals. He is a rarity and an icon that all of us can look to, whatever our views of the world may be, as a way of conducting ourselves in this place and in the broader community. With those comments, I join with all the previous speakers in passing on my sincere condolences to Pen and the Hetherington family. Pen was someone whom many of us who studied at the University of Western Australia would have known as a very active member of the community. For his contribution to the Australian Labor Party, this Parliament and the state of Western Australia, we owe a great debt to Bob Hetherington, and we should be eternally grateful for the contribution that he made. Wherever he is today, may he continue to promote democracy.

HON ADELE FARINA (South West) [2.30 pm]: I would also like to pass on my condolences to the Hetherington family, and acknowledge the contribution that Bob Hetherington made to the state of Western Australia. I will not repeat a lot of what has been said because it has been eloquently put by other speakers, but I wanted to make a few points about his time as a lecturer. He joined the University of Western Australia in 1966 and was a lecturer there for 10 years. I do not know whether many people know this, but he actually established the first year course in the politics department at UWA—a fact I had not previously known. He had a reputation for being a particularly hard marker, and apparently failed one-third of his students. That was because Bob used to tell his students not to sit at his feet and expect to be told truths; he expected them to debate and argue. He expected them to challenge his views in the work they did, and I think that if he felt they were just being lazy they got a fail mark. In the style of a true intellect, he continually wanted to grow and be challenged, and he encouraged his students to take that path as well. A student is recorded as saying that Bob was the first person who made him think, and I think there could not be a greater accolade given to a person than to say, “You actually challenged me and caused me to rethink my position on things.” In fact, in one of his classes when a student simply regurgitated what Bob had said in a lecture, Bob indicated his displeasure and said that what the student had said was nonsense. The student challenged him and said that it was what Bob had said in the lecture, and Bob said, “Yes, but since giving that lecture I have had a very detailed debate with another student who changed my mind, and I have a different view on the matter now.” It is heartening. I have to say that I am really disappointed that he was no longer a lecturer by the time I got to the UWA politics department because I would have enjoyed being a student of Bob's.

I attended Bob's funeral and listened to the eulogy and contributions made by various family members. It was very heartening and touching to hear that despite having a very, very active life, Bob always made time for family. He had a very, very close and personal relationship with each of his children and grandchildren, and his great-grandchild, and we heard some great stories during that day. When Bob was a member of Parliament, no matter how busy life got, and no matter how important an event was, if it was on a Sunday night he would not attend. He would put aside Sunday nights for family nights, and no matter what was happening, his family came first. I think that we will all admit to being guilty of not putting our families first from time to time because of the demands of our job. I think it is a great credit to Bob that he recognised that family comes first and that family is important, and because he had to give up a lot of family events due to the demands of his job, he made the commitment to set Sunday nights aside for a family dinner. That is a credit to him.

Bob was a great intellect who enjoyed a great debate, but I remember him as, above all, a very gentle man. He was an intellect who always enjoyed a good debate and argument, but he was always gentle and respectful in his approach. It was a great privilege to have known Bob for the short time I did, and it was clear from what I heard at his funeral that he had a very close and loving relationship with each of his children and grandchildren and his great-grandchild, and his beloved wife, Pen. I am sure they will all miss him greatly, and I pass on my condolences to the Hetherington family.

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Barry House): Members, I also wish to join members in the condolence motion for Hon Robert Hetherington. I am the only current member of the Western Australian Parliament who actually served in this chamber with Bob Hetherington, from October 1987 to May 1989. I am sure he would be pleased,

20-odd years later, now that I am the President, seeing me not adorned with some of the anachronistic garments that were referred to in the previous debate!

During those 18 months I certainly developed a respect for Bob Hetherington as a thoughtful, educated academic who made very well-researched contributions to debates. It was summed up by one notice I saw in *The West Australian* that described him as a “wise, just and principled man”. He came to the Legislative Council from a background of being raised in a political family in South Australia, where his father-in-law was a minister of the Crown, and from an excellent education background, specialising in history and political science. From there he saw extensive public service in various states and various locations, and ended up in academic circles, originally with the University of Adelaide and then to Western Australia with the University of Western Australia and Murdoch University. He actually returned to academia after he finished his 12-year stint as a member of the Legislative Council.

His direct political involvement with the Australian Labor Party goes back to 1959, and he served 12 years as the Labor MLC for East Metropolitan Province initially, and then for South-East Province between the years of 1983 and 1989. In Parliament he made very strong contributions to policy matters and parliamentary committees, particularly the emerging government agencies committee, which was in many respects the forerunner of the standing committee system operating in the Legislative Council today.

I congratulate and thank Bob Hetherington for his significant contribution to public life in Western Australia and this institution in particular. I offer my condolences to his family and friends and, as is the custom, I ask members to rise in their places to observe one minute’s silence.

Question passed; members standing.

The PRESIDENT: I will convey a *Hansard* copy of this debate and a letter from the Legislative Council to his family.