



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Jock Ferguson MLC**  
**(Member for East Metropolitan)**

**Loan Bill 2009**

**Legislative Council**

**Wednesday, 24 June 2009**



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#### LOAN BILL 2009

##### *Second Reading*

**HON JOCK FERGUSON (East Metropolitan)** [8.20 pm]: Firstly, I would like to congratulate you, Mr President, on your election and I look forward to making a contribution in this place under the guidance of your gavel, which I am certain will be measured and fair.

As I rise to introduce myself in this house, I would like to begin by acknowledging the Nyoongah people, the traditional owners of this land on which we meet today. I am mindful of their ongoing cultural and spiritual connections to the lands of the south west, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present.

I would also like to acknowledge some of the past members of the East Metropolitan Region—the now Senator Louise Pratt, Hon Nick Griffiths and Hon Batong Pham—for all their good work in this place and I sincerely wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

I am truly honoured to stand in this place today on behalf of the Australian Labor Party and the people of the East Metropolitan Region of Western Australia who have put their trust and faith in me. It is a great privilege that has been bestowed on me and I will honour that trust and faith at all times.

Today I would like to talk a little about some of the experiences that have shaped my life and career and, in turn, the values that I hold close. No doubt you, Mr President, will have noticed that I have not always lived in Western Australia. My accent, which—believe it or not—has been somewhat tempered over the years by Australian influences, has given me the dubious honour of being the only union official in the country who had to appear in a headline news story on a commercial television station with subtitles. True story! Hopefully I am understood by the members of this place without such an aid.

I was born and raised in the working-class area of Possilpark, Glasgow to an unwed Catholic woman. Such was the stigma attached to unmarried mothers and illegitimate children in those times that my mother was sent away to a convent outside of Glasgow for some months before I was born. I was very fortunate to be raised by my grandparents, believing for many years that they were my parents, and not knowing that my sister was in fact my mother. It was a situation not unusual in the community at that time. It was not until nearly eight years ago that I was made aware of the full extent of my mother's story. Two years after I was born, she had another child, this time a girl, who with the assistance of the Catholic Church was adopted outside the family. Life went on for this young girl, who eventually discovered in a most upsetting way that she was adopted. It was never

discussed openly and remained a taboo subject in her adopted family. Some years later, following the death of her adopted mother, my sister began to search for her birth mother, the woman I had believed was my sister. Her name was Molly. She searched on and off for many years, to no avail. Little or no help was provided to her by the various organisations and government agencies, so secretive and taboo was the issue. Eventually she made contact with the husband of one of my mother's cousins who, when asked if he knew about a child, replied yes, the family was aware that Molly had a son. Shocked and surprised, she realised that she had a brother and then quickly tracked me down. My sister had never given up, tracing through records, asking questions, writing letters and doorknocking in some of the toughest areas in Glasgow where we had lived. She was ultimately successful in finding me. Unfortunately, she never got to meet our mother, who had passed away some years earlier.

The reason I relate this part of my history is because it is a very human story, steeped in prejudice and secrets that had tragic consequences for my family. There existed not just the prejudice and shame of being born illegitimately into a Catholic community but the revelation that my sister and I are believed to be full blood siblings, divided for most of our lives due to religious bigotry and discrimination. Our mother was Catholic and our father was Protestant and they were forbidden to marry. Of all my life experiences, the discovery of my sister and parentage has highlighted the truly cataclysmic effect that ignorance and discrimination can have on the everyday lives and experiences of families and individuals. My sister was robbed of ever meeting her mother and we were separated from each other for over 50 years.

I intend to work hard in this place to build positive changes out of this personal experience, to ensure that as law-makers we are always working towards breaking down some of the barriers and prejudices that exclude people and their families from fully participating in our society and achieving personal fulfilment. I value the diversity of the electorate that I represent and I believe that there is great value in working towards strong communities where everyone is respected, valued and has a voice regardless of their age, faith, race, sexual preference, gender or disability.

As I indicated previously, I was born in a place called Possilpark. It is a part of Glasgow that has an interesting history and some pertinent lessons for us given the current economic climate and the continued drift of manufacturing jobs overseas. The area, which had served as the country residence of Glasgow merchant John Campbell, was partially sold to Walter Macfarlane in 1849 to expand his Saracen iron foundry works. With new railway access to the area and Macfarlane's grand vision, Possilpark went from being residence for 10 people in 1872 to well over 10 000 by 1891. It was described by the Glasgow Town Council as one of the finest and best conducted developments in the city, the beating heart of Glasgow, which at that time was the second city of the British empire after London. Distinctly a working-class area, Possilpark provided labour to the foundry, engineering, railway works and other manufacturing firms that set up in the area and it had a very strong and vibrant community life. In the mid-1960s the foundry was taken over, closed and demolished, all within a three-year period. In the following decade across Glasgow a host of metal works, shipyards and engineering plants closed and the work moved offshore. Between the mid-1970s and early 1990s Glasgow lost two-thirds of the 107 515 manufacturing jobs its residents had relied on. The service industry jobs that the government insisted would replace them never eventuated in the required numbers. This situation was replicated throughout the manufacturing sectors of much of west Scotland. By the 1980s, only 15 years after the closing of the foundry around which Possilpark was built, it became, as the United Kingdom *Evening Times* put it, "The hub of one of Britain's only expanding industries in the 1980s, the heroin trade." The once strong and vibrant community had fallen victim to a cascading loss of jobs and increased instability and anxiety among the few who had managed to maintain some form of employment. As we all know, dignified work is central to how the members of any community realise their place in society, and it

is crucial for maintaining a sense of personal dignity and self-worth. The people of Possilpark suffered the consequences of the stripping of industry and loss of jobs for decades afterwards, with deeply entrenched long-term unemployment, high crime rates, the scourge of drugs and violence, one of the lowest life expectancies in Britain, and significant numbers of people suffering from malnutrition and other conditions associated with tremendous poverty.

Although it is an extreme example, Possilpark is not wholly unlike our own communities, past and present, in Western Australia. The community was built around the manufacturing industry and when that was destroyed, the area was deeply wounded and it bears the scars to this day. In the current times of economic uncertainty, many communities have been maimed by the loss of significant industry or manufacturing; Ravensthorpe immediately comes to mind. In my own electorate, many communities in the south eastern corridor rely on a strong manufacturing sector to provide employment—places such as Rockingham and Kwinana—and would be devastated if there were to be a further significant reduction in industrial capacity.

My career history has been largely in the manufacturing sector, or representing workers in the manufacturing sector. It all began in Possilpark under the tutelage of my grandfather, who was a convener of the Boilermakers Union and a member of the Communist Party. My union career began as a fitter's apprentice delegate on my first job, at age 17. Keen to get a share of the new tradesperson's pay deal, and full of youthful exuberance, the boilermaker's apprentice delegate and I pulled the job up, with the intention of staying out until the apprentices got their share. It lasted only long enough for me to be summoned to the yard manager's office and informed that, as apprentices, our indentures did not allow us to take strike action, and that every one of the nearly 200 apprentices in the yard would be sacked. Although shocked, I took the news decidedly better than the boilermaker's delegate, who burst into tears in the office, saying, "My mammy's gonna kill me!" Crestfallen, we bumped into my grandfather when exiting the office. After he had heard our story, brief negotiations were carried out with the yard manager and his threat was not acted upon. Needless to say, I recognised that I had a lot to learn about negotiations and strategy. My grandfather's words still ring in my ears: "Never, ever, ever do that again." I never have, but to this day I still do not know whether I was set up by my grandfather and the yard boss!

When I left Scotland it was by sea, as a member of the British Merchant Navy, travelling the world for five years before ending up in New Zealand. I eventually found my way across the Tasman and across the continent to Western Australia. I spent a significant time in the Pilbara and Gascoyne regions working as a fitter. I became a shop steward and then convener of the Metal Workers' Union, as it was then known, at Dampier in the north west. I later became an appointed organiser on stage 2 of the North West Shelf gas project, before being elected organiser of that project.

I was then elected assistant state secretary of what is now the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, under secretary John Sharp-Collett, before accepting the honour of leading the AMWU as the state secretary in 2000. It has been a great honour to serve in various positions with the AMWU, which is one of the most progressive unions in Australia. It is concerned with not only improving the wages and conditions of Australian workers—although that remains a top priority—but also social justice, human rights and sustainability issues. For example, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union continues to take a progressive and long-term view on the issue of climate change. The union recognises not only the opportunity to build new industries and create thousands of sustainable jobs, but also the growth in green jobs that will result from the "greening" of traditional industries. This equates to supporting new industries based on renewable energy technologies, including geothermal energy, solar technology and tidal energy, whilst also working with existing industries and employers to reduce waste and increase recycling measures. There is clearly great support in the community I represent for green initiatives, with thousands of my constituents participating in recycling initiatives or making small and large daily changes to reduce their

footprint on the environment. I believe that the members of this place have a crucial role to play in the future expansion of these new industries and initiatives; inaction on our part is no longer a viable option.

The work I have done in the past has always focused on ensuring that Western Australia has a strong and sustainable manufacturing sector and that this valuable industry continues to grow into the future. I have worked with governments of both persuasions to ensure that there is significant investment in infrastructure, and I am pleased to have been involved in the development of the Australian Marine Complex. From its inception in 1998 and 1999, I worked very closely with Hon Hendy Cowan—who is a strong supporter of local content—when it was known as the Jervois Bay project.

I was a member of the liaison committee for the Australian Marine Complex common-user facility, which provides open access infrastructure for companies to service as the marine, defence, resource and oil and gas industries. The common-user facility has enabled Western Australian-based companies to secure and deliver fabrication and assembly projects for large infrastructure modules used in mining and oil and gas projects locally and internationally, as well as complete maintenance work for commercial and Royal Australian Navy vessels.

I was a member of the Western Australian Skills Advisory Board and State Training Board, and I worked on reforming the apprenticeship and traineeship system to ensure that we have people with the right skills required by industry. I worked very closely with the former Minister for Training, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, and we made tremendous changes to the apprenticeship system.

I have lobbied big business and government to break down tenders into bite-sized chunks to ensure small and medium-sized local firms and local suppliers get a fair go, rather than the omnibus tenders that smaller local firms cannot possibly supply. I was a member of the State Supply Commission, and I worked hard to ensure that, when possible, government procurements supported Western Australian industry.

I also sat on a number of other boards, including the Western Australian Manufacturing Industry Consultative Council, the Oil and Gas Industry Coordinating Council, and the Industry Capability Network Advisory Board. The value of these boards can be easily demonstrated; for example, the tripartite Oil and Gas Industry Coordinating Council has been effective in addressing a number of issues facing the industry. It was also instrumental in attracting a substantial sub-sea oil and gas industry to Western Australia. Having said that, I note with great concern that none of those boards have met since this current government's election last September. I would ask the government to review its position on that.

My time on these boards gave me extensive experience working in and around governments to facilitate better outcomes for the Western Australian manufacturing sector, and, in turn, its workers. I have a history of working extensively with employers and government to attract lucrative contracts to the state and build the capacity of our industry overall, creating jobs and increasing productivity. I believe that there is always more that can be done and I will work to ensure that the current government invests in infrastructure and skills, and maintains procurement practices that do not discriminate against local companies, and that it acts to support local jobs, particularly in this current economic climate.

A number of honourable members opposite support this issue of local content and local manufacturing. In fact, it is a pity he is not in this place tonight, but the first time I met Hon Simon O'Brien we shared a sausage on a picket line in Kwinana during a long dispute with a company that had imported a whole fertiliser plant from South Africa to the detriment of local business. When I say we shared a sausage, he ate the sausage and I ate the bun; I do not eat sausages because I know

what is in them. The workers were very grateful for his support then, so I hope that the Minister for Transport is continuing to carry the flag at the cabinet table supporting the manufacturing industry and educating his colleagues on why it is so important to support this industry for future generations.

As all new members do, I have a number of people to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude. I would like to recognise some of my comrades who have mentored, guided and assisted me in my time at the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union as an official and a secretary. The late Harold Peden, who was state president of the AMWU; Julius Roe, who is the present national president of the AMWU; Dave Oliver, the present national secretary of the AMWU; Senator Doug Cameron, ex-national secretary of the AMWU and whom from time to time I have been mistaken for; and my very dear friend, Keith Peckham, ex-state president. I also thank all the state secretaries of the AMWU who have assisted me in the past and in particular, Paul Bastian, the state secretary of the New South Wales branch.

The Western Australian branch of the AMWU under the compelling leadership of the secretary, Steve McCartney, is doing tremendous work, particularly in the areas of job creation and the recognition of the importance of Aboriginal culture and training in the north west. Steve McCartney is a man of integrity, intelligence and vision, and a very good friend. I wish him and all the officials and staff of the AMWU my best wishes for their future endeavours.

I already feel very comfortable standing in this place today, particularly because I now spend my sitting days sitting next to my best mate, Hon Jon Ford. We are both proud members of the AMWU and we are both fitters. I thank him for many years of invaluable friendship and support. I also thank Hon Sally Talbot for her wise counsel and friendship. I think the Leader of the Opposition is a wonderful person—I just thought I would put that in there. Yes; lick, lick!

I thank my electorate staff, Cindy Portland and Claire Comrie, for their efficiency—I think they are in the gallery somewhere—guidance and good humour. I look forward to working with them for the people of the East Metropolitan Region. To many other friends and comrades—Stephen Dawson; Dennis Liddelow; Senator Louise Pratt; Andy Duffy; Alan Stewart and his partner Sue; Neil Byrne; Joe Craig and his wife, Betty, who are no doubt looking at this streaming on the internet in Texas; and Daniel and Amelia Kennedy, thank you for all your hard work over the years, advancing the interests of working people, but more importantly, thank you for your friendship.

To my children, and I will do this in chronological order—as I say, we were pretty poor in Possilpark; we did not have television!—Ian, Steven, David, Andrew, James, Stephanie, Shaun and Claire; and to my grandchildren, Nathan, Reece and Jesse, you have taught me so much and brought such infinite joy into my life. Thank you for your understanding and support and I love you all so very much.

Obviously, I give special thanks to my sister Monica, particularly for never giving up. I hope to have as many years with her as we have had apart. I think she is watching this streaming from Scotland as we speak, and I love you, Monica.

I give special recognition to my partner, Tina—I can see her in the gallery—who I must say has had to put up with a considerable amount over the years looking after me. I recognise that it has not been an easy task working full-time, running a household and having a partner with a career that demands a lot of time away from home. I thank her for her love and support in what were often difficult times—I love you and I appreciate that.

In conclusion, after leaving the AMWU last year, I was presented with an award of merit for my service to the union. At the bottom of the certificate is a note that sums up simply the causes to which I have dedicated, and will continue to dedicate, my life and work. To paraphrase, it says: may we all see the day when the unity of the community and the workers becomes so strong that we see

the end of unemployment and poverty in the midst of plenty, and it is replaced by a just and equitable system that ensures a full and happy life to all who render useful service in our society.  
[Applause.]

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