

[Thursday, 31 May 1990.]

MR McGINTY (Fremantle) [10.13 am]: On Saturday, 26 May the people of Fremantle elected me to be their representative in this Parliament. Although the by-election had both local and Statewide dimensions, it was clear on the doorstep and on the streets of Fremantle that electors were called to pass judgment on the performance of the State Government. The group known as People for Fair and Open Government urged the people of Fremantle to put the Labor candidate last on the ballot paper, as did the Liberal party and most of the so-called independent candidates. The people of Fremantle were asked in the by-election whether they supported the Government or whether they wished to have the blocking of Supply and a further election. On doorsteps and on the street, as well as in the ballot boxes, the message was clear: The people of the area did not want another election. There is no groundswell of popular feeling against the Government. There is no support for the uncertainty and chaos which would flow from the blocking of Supply. In fact, a positive feeling exists in the community that the Premier, Carmen Lawrence, and the State Labor Government are facing up to the unpleasant realities of past mistakes and getting on with the business of governing the State.

The people want a Government that is concerned about what I regard to be traditional Labor values, and they saw the current Government as offering exactly that. By that I mean a Government which is committed to caring for ordinary people, and in particular for the more disadvantaged members of our community. They are concerned that there be a Government that has as a priority the creation of jobs to ensure that the wealth in our community is shared among all people, along with a concern for the environment. I digress briefly to note that the original greenies in modern Australia were found in the trade union movement led by Jack Munday and others in Sydney in the 1960s. By means of "green bans" they worked to preserve the heritage and environment of that city. The green movement has been taken over in recent times by people who are not part of the trade union movement.

Traditional Labor values involve a Government concerned about the standard of living, not only regarding wages and salaries, but also in the broader questions relating to the social wage in the provision of health services and education and the various aspects that make up the standard of living of ordinary people. Overriding all these aspects is the need for a Government to be committed to the concept of social justice to create a more egalitarian society in terms of equity, access and participation. It was clear that if a Statewide poll were to be held in the next few months, the Labor Party would win comfortably because it is seen by people to offer the sort of Government to which I refer.

A traditional Labor value which surfaced throughout the by-election campaign in the seat of Fremantle, and one issue which the people wished their representative in Parliament to espouse, was that of care and concern for ordinary people. I have spent all my adult working life in the trade union movement. In 1978 I became the Secretary of the Miscellaneous Workers Union which was formed by the legendary Fremantle trade union figure, Paddy Troy. The union was formed in 1955 on the waterfront following the deregistration of the former waterfront union; the deregistration was instigated by the then conservative Government. By the process of amalgamation it has now become one of the largest unions in Western Australia. In its short history it has established itself as one of Western Australia's truly great trade unions. Its membership is made up of people who are not of themselves powerful or important. It is made up of cleaners, hospital workers, process workers, child care aides, construction and maintenance workers, teachers' aides and security officers, to name a few. The majority of the union's membership are women, many of whom work on a part-time basis and many of whom come from a non-English speaking background; many of these people work in low skilled and low paid employment. It is these ordinary Western Australians that any Government must have in the forefront of its thinking when considering legislative and administrative action and policy, rather than maintaining a preoccupation with the important and powerful people in our society.

I will refer to a number of groups which fit into this area and deserve the prime attention of this Parliament. I refer first to Aboriginals. Statistics show, and I do not think anyone would seriously doubt it, that per capita income of Aboriginal people is well below that of non-Aboriginal people. The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people is dramatically higher than that for non-Aboriginal people. The incarceration rates are between 10 and 20 times higher for Aboriginal people than for non-Aboriginal people, depending on whether prisons or police lockups are the yardstick, and the incidence of custodial deaths is comparably higher. The life expectancy of an Aboriginal is 22 years less than that of a non-Aboriginal. Numerous statistics exist and each of them indicates that this Government has not achieved in any sense equality for Aboriginal people. All the indicators point to an alienated, dispossessed and oppressed people. I will endeavour, in my term in this Parliament, to provide positive measures to support self determination by Aboriginal people, economic and social self reliance and generally to enhance the welfare of the Aboriginal people of this country. In this context the old Swan Brewery site dispute needs to be reconsidered. In my view it is a social justice issue rather than a simple question of whether one ought to preserve an old building.

I also refer to the plight of migrant workers in this State. In Fremantle many migrant workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation. Special programs are needed for these people, and I pay particular attention to the "English on the Job" program. This battle was fought several years ago and is now established as an industrial right via a number of awards through the Industrial Relations Commission for workers with a non-English speaking background. This program needs to be extended if we are to say, in any sense, that our migrant people in the work force have any sort of equality in terms of access or participation in their employment.

I believe the Government needs to take action to remove discrimination between conditions of employment for its own employees. Government blue collar workers have inferior conditions of employment compared with their white collar counterparts. Many migrants are employed to clean our hospitals, to clean our schools, to provide our water and sewerage services and a range of other Government services. If one has the misfortune of being classified as a blue collar worker, one has to wait three years longer to qualify for long service leave than does a white collar worker. White collar workers receive long service leave after seven years, blue collar workers after 10 years; white collar workers receive 15 sick days per year, blue collar workers receive 10; white collar workers receive 12 public holidays a year, blue collar workers receive only 10. In just about every case the Government's conditions of employment disadvantage the blue collar workers. They should be the primary concern of this Parliament, not the white collar workers. Any differences which rely solely on class are unacceptable and should be removed. I call upon the Government to remove this discrimination from its own employment and to establish itself as a model employer.

One of the major issues over which the Fremantle by-election was fought was the issue of the environment. On the doorstep and in the polling booth the people of Fremantle continually emphasised their concern for their physical surroundings. They spoke to me of their unique heritage, which is Fremantle, and the need to continue the process that has been set in train to preserve its historic buildings. They also spoke of the need to enhance the quality of their lives generally, and these comments, while made in the context of Fremantle, are applicable throughout the State. Fremantle is both a residential and an industrial commercial area, consequently it is necessary to provide access for trucks to the commercial areas, in particular the Port of Fremantle, but due to inadequate planning over the years we have a hotchpotch of roads in the Fremantle area. Heavy trucks use the streets in residential areas and we must remove them from those areas in order to enhance the amenity of the city itself for the people who live in it.

I am pleased that recently the Government has seen fit to announce the removal from the metropolitan regional planning scheme plans for two highways which would have divided the City of Fremantle and its community - the Roe Freeway extension into South Fremantle along Marine Terrace and the eastern bypass. I believe these decisions will enhance Fremantle significantly as a place for families to live. It is also time that people reconsidered the freeway mentality on which this city has been planned. We have far too many freeways planned for this city, and at least now Fremantle will be able to proceed on the basis that the city and the community will not be divided by traffic attracting freeways throughout the area. Of great benefit to the people of Fremantle will be the freeing up of land within the city as a result of those two decisions. That land can be used to provide much needed services for the community in the form of aged accommodation and it will also open up access to South Beach which would have been effectively and permanently closed to the public had the Roe Freeway extensions proceeded. These decisions will enable planning to proceed with a measure of certainty and enhance Fremantle as a place in which to live. Environmental priorities in Fremantle include the need to act expeditiously and remove the noxious industries from the Coogee strip; to act to remove the visual pollution from the South Fremantle power station; and to remove the noise pollution from trucks running through the residential areas of the City of Fremantle.

On a far broader level, rather than simply looking at the local environment, the people of Fremantle generally approve of the pro-environment stance taken by the State Government. It is clear that people have become far more environmentally aware. I call upon the Government to declare Mt Lesueur a national park and to prohibit the development of an open cut coalmine and privately operated power station in that area. Such action is proposed vandalism and would destroy the many values of that important area to the State and to its future. A change in lifestyles and consumption patterns is necessary if we are to conserve and enhance the environment of this State, this country and this planet. We must leave a place for our children to lead healthy and wholesome lives, and unless strong action is taken that will not occur.

I will conclude my inaugural speech in this Parliament by saying thank you to the people of Fremantle. They have placed in me a trust that I hope I can honour and I shall certainly be working hard to ensure that I do honour that trust. I shall also place on record my thanks to the Labor movement and particularly the trade union movement which has throughout my employment given me great support. It has been superb to be part of a team of people who have worked to enhance the lives and living standards of the work force in this State. That support has continued during this election campaign.

I also express my thanks to the political wing of the Labor movement for giving me the honour of representing it in this Parliament as a Labor Party member. I am proud to be able to represent the people of Fremantle in this Parliament.

[Applause.]