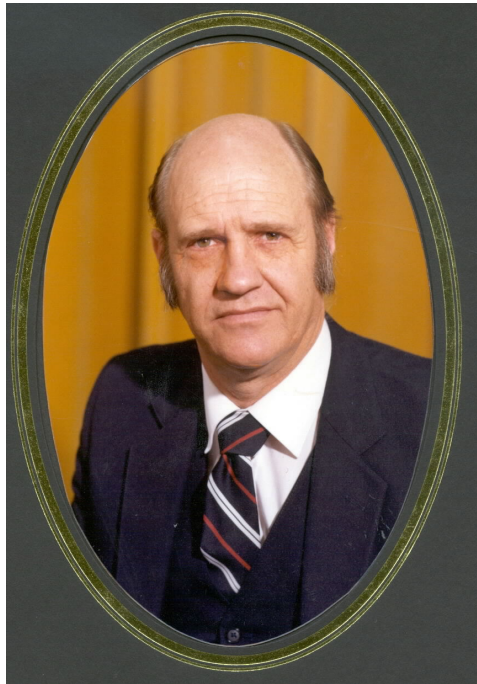




**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Mr Arthur Raymond Tonkin, MLA**  
**(Member for Mirrabooka)**

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply: First Day

Thursday, 15 July 1971

# Legislative Assembly

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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY: FIRST DAY

### *Motion*

**MR. A. R. TONKIN** (Mirrabooka) [3.52 p.m.]: I move—

That the following Address-In-Reply to His Excellency's Speech be agreed to:—

May it please Your Excellency: We the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of the State of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express loyalty to our most Gracious Sovereign, and to thank Your Excellency for the Speech you have been pleased to address to Parliament.

I wish to express my gratitude to the people of Mirrabooka, for having decided to send me to this Parliament as their representative. I can assure them that they will have my undivided dedication to their interests at all times.

Congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker, upon your elevation to the esteemed and high office you now hold. I also wish to congratulate the Premier and his Ministers on their most important appointments, and also for the undoubted energy they have shown in grappling with this great State's many problems.

I am most grateful to the members of this Parliament and to the staff of Parliament House for the courtesy and understanding they have shown to me as a new member.

I am very conscious of the honour and privilege that I have in speaking as a member of the Legislative Assembly. This place is the focal point of community life in this State. At times, members of Parliament have complained that the powers of Parliament are being abrogated by extra-parliamentary forces, and that there are other elements taking the place of Parliament as the fountain of the law and government. Mr. Speaker, may I suggest that if we—the people assembled—are in danger of losing our position of power and primacy to extra-parliamentary forces then we must be largely to blame.

I would like to pose this question: Whose fault is it that extra-parliamentary forces have had to move against retail price maintenance, which had been allowed to flourish for decades? If we do not lead the people along the path of progress, then we cannot complain if other forces take over the leadership.

Experience has shown us the fate of many, many institutions in all times and in all places that have become irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of the people. Such moribund institutions are swept into the dustbin of history. So, Sir, we look forward, under your guiding hand, to a fruitful session of legislative reform.

His Excellency referred to the sharp deterioration that has occurred in the rural sector over the past twelve months. Now, I do not claim to be an expert on our agricultural and pastoral industries, but there is one aspect upon which I would like to touch briefly. The malaise which has descended upon our primary industries is partly due, I believe, to various forms of protection which have been accorded certain sections of our economy. Protection takes various forms. It can be a payment of subsidy; it can be the imposition of a tariff. However, it can also be a function of the omission of certain needful legislative programmes such as the control of restrictive trade practices. This, also, is a form of protection for certain favoured sectors.

Protection in various forms may be given to an infant industry because it is considered that the industry is needed for our economic or strategic betterment. However, once that industry is established it is associated with the powerful forces of organised capital and organised labour and it may not be so easy to deny protection to that industry.

In other words, the protection which was originally accorded for economic reasons—and here I shall be charitable and assume in this hypothetical case that there were no political motives—cannot be taken off for political reasons.

Tariffs and subsidies produce less real wealth because economic resources are attracted to high cost industries and, conversely, drawn away from low cost industries. This reduces the total income of the nation because resources are being channelled into unsuitable sectors.

This, I believe, is a cogent reason for our indifferent rate of economic growth. It is this low growth rate which leads to a reduction in the resources available for reinvestment which, in turn, leads to our reliance upon overseas capital. In the end this must place us in an invidious balance of payments position.

The essence of the problem so far as our primary industries are concerned is that many industries only need protection in order to be able to pay the cost of protection to other industries. In other words, one industry's protection becomes

another's cost. Consequently the wool producer, for example, is squeezed between costs and prices and, moreover, the prices are determined by the world market over which he has no control. The result is that strong industries are being squeezed between costs and prices and, I believe, we have begun to destroy them.

Wool prices are not absolutely too low at the present time, but they are too low relative to the present cost structure. It is a cost structure which has been raised by various forms of protection, as I have already indicated, and by restrictive trade practices which have been outlawed in other countries such as Britain and the United States, which, in this aspect at least, are more enlightened countries than Australia.

I probably do not need to add that Western Australia bears the burden of the cost of protection to a disproportionate extent due to the structure of the economy. The fact that the results of protection cannot be easily quantified leads to confusion which blunts the edge of opposition, and inertia dictates that the position will continue. I question a policy which helps our weak industries to prosper and destroys our strong industries. An overall diminution in real wealth is the chief outcome.

I am very proud to belong to a Government which very early in its life acted as though it trusted the people by making two decisions of crucial importance to education. One of these was the release to the people of the Australian Education Council's survey of needs. I cannot agree that the people whose children are to be educated and who foot the bill should be kept in ignorance of the dire straits in which education finds itself.

Another decision of courage, I believe, was to give the teachers permission to criticise the Government—an opportunity several have been quick to seize. Surely our responsibility in education is to the students and to society. I believe a frank and uninhibited exchange of views will further these aims. So I would congratulate the Government upon these enlightened steps.

There is a crisis in education. Over 24,000 primary school children are being taught in classes of 40 or more. There are thousands of children whose rate of learning is slower than average for various reasons and who are denied the opportunity of satisfactory remedial treatment. Special education is provided for only 1.75 per cent. of primary school children and for less than 1 per cent. of secondary students. Many children are taught in substandard accommodation that would not be tolerated in the commercial world.

To suggest that there is no crisis in the face of those facts does not reveal anything about the state of education; but it does, I believe, say a great deal for the priorities and sense of values of the speaker concerned.

The Federal Government must come to the rescue. However, it prefers to use our money so that, for example, education officers in the armed services in some cases have been teaching only three periods a week. Just imagine that waste of teacher-hours while little tots of five and six are being taught in classes of over 40 and are being marked for life by such a traumatic introduction to education. No wonder two-thirds of our young people are pleased to sever their connections with their schools at the age of 14 or 15. It says a great deal for our society when men in the armed services receive such pampered treatment at the expense of our very young children.

So, a very large part of the solution of our education problems rests, not with a State Government, but with our Federal Government and ultimately, of course, with the people. However, when dealing with education, we must avoid using assembly line techniques when evaluating the problems and the solutions. There is a qualitative side to education and if it is neglected while we concern ourselves only with dollars and cents, then all our efforts will be swirled away as water down a drain.

We must be prepared to review our fundamental philosophy. So much of our educational effort is misdirected, I believe, because many of the practising teachers are hazy as to the achievable and desirable ends.

When percipient man looks at our condition upon this globe, one aspect of our development shrieks for attention. Marvellous as our progress has been over the past century, our development is distorted and uneven. On the one hand we have an explosion of knowledge—although the last word in this respect has not yet been said—distance has been conquered, communication around the globe is almost instantaneous, and we have the ability to destroy by thermonuclear or bacteriological war. Man is truly a wondrous creature!

And yet, when we look at our development in the field of the humanities, in the field of controlling our own emotions, and in the field of understanding our fellow man, then we are brute savages who are scarcely removed from pithecanthropus. Here there is no knowledge explosion!

This is the tragedy of man. Having developed one aspect of his potential and not the others, he is like a baby playing with a very sharp knife. Not yet having control over himself, he is likely to do himself a fatal injury. This explains why he uses his brilliantly inventive mind to perpetuate the horrors of an Auschwitz, a Nagasaki, or a My Lai. What is the point of developing our technology if we are going to use it to destroy ourselves? Wended to bend our intellects, our energies and our wills to the task of building a society that will ensure a better life for our children.

However, we are still compounding the error. If we examine the situation in our senior high schools we find it quite possible—even likely—that a student will proceed to his Leaving Certificate examination and yet not enter in his

final two years upon the study of those subjects which confront him with some of the great social issues upon which he will have to make decisions for the next 50 years or so. Part of the blame for the extreme narrowness of such an education must be placed at the feet of those who constructed the matriculation regulations.

The narrowness continues for those students who go on to university. We cannot afford to have physicians, engineers, physicists, and so on who are social illiterates. It may be argued that there is not enough time for all students to study all subjects. This is very true. However, everyone is a citizen! Everyone is given the franchise at 18! I will never be called upon to build a bridge: I will leave that to the engineer.

I will never be called upon to diagnose a case of embolism; I will entrust that task to the physician. But each and every one of us is called upon to make decisions on the course society should take. Yet it is precisely this field—the field of social sciences, the field of study that will lead to progress in our understanding of man the individual and of man in society—that is most neglected; a neglect that will lead us very rapidly to our undoing.

If we want our young people to understand and cherish democracy; if we are concerned that they may be lead astray by demagogues, then we should give them the tools so that they may be able to evaluate the many and varied ideas with which they will be assailed. If a student's roots go deep into the democratic processes, he will be able to withstand the seductive blandishments of extremists whether they be of the left or the right.

I believe it is immoral to say to our youth: "You can have power by way of the vote, but we will do nothing to equip you with the knowledge and the wisdom that will help you to make decisions that will save mankind from disaster."

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