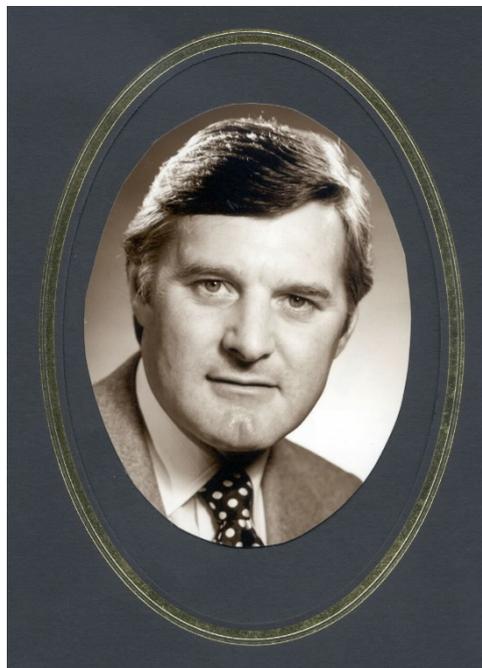




PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Oscar (Neil) Blackburne Oliver, MLC
(Member for West)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 2 August 1977

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

THE HON. O. N. B. OLIVER (West) [8.10 p.m.]: Mr President, I am honoured to take my place in this Chamber; its history is a most significant one. It traces the rise of parliamentary democracy in Western Australia, Firstly through the inclusion of citizens in Captain Stirling's first Council of Officials, and the subsequent growth of citizen representation; later, in 1870, in the establishment of the first semi-elective Legislative Council; then, in 1890, in its incorporation into our first self-governing Parliament; and, finally, in 1965, in its transition to a full adult franchise form of representation.

Throughout its long history, this House has stood for the principles of concern for legislative quality, resistance to damaging change, and encouragement of progressive thought and action for public value.

In entering this House, I pledge myself to stand by those principles. In doing so, I will be continuing the work of my respected predecessor, the Hon. Roy Abbey who, for 19 years, served his constituents in this Chamber. The former honourable member is a quiet man who served his people unremittingly and with high honour. He was the kind whose performance one could rely on and whose word one could trust, and if in my service in this House I can emulate the Hon. Roy Abbey, I will have been well rewarded.

It is in this spirit in my maiden speech in this historic Chamber that I should like to share some of the hopes with which I have entered the Parliament of Western Australia. Unfortunately, respect for Parliament is not as it should be, or as it could be. I believe the fundamental cause lies in the fact that Parliament has given too much attention to the making of laws and not enough to the giving of leadership.

None of us will deny the need for a framework of laws. But neither can any of us deny that laws need to serve a fundamental community purpose. Laws which serve only official purposes or express only a political fanaticism over petty detail invite disrespect and rejection. By doing so, they undermine respect for law which is vital for the preservation of real standards in the community. In my view, we have suffered from an excess of this kind of lawmaking, by-lawmaking and regulation making.

In housing, the dead weight of laws and regulations is threatening the very survival of the private home. Cost has been added to cost, all piled on the altar of narrow subservience to theoretical standards which have long since buried common sense. I will be developing this position during my service in this House.

In planning, the same strangling influence is felt. The present purpose, one tends to feel, is to fight against rather than facilitate response to public demand for places to live. Scandalous delay now is the norm; scandalous, unnecessary escalation of cost to the ordinary homeseeker and property user is the result. I will be developing this position also during my service in this House. For the moment, I introduce these references as pointers to the attitude I intend to adopt on the legislative process.

I am deeply concerned that Parliament should give the quality of moral and intellectual leadership in thought and action which engenders the highest respect for law as a framework for civilised living, that upholds personal and family security and safeguards the responsible expression of personal freedoms. I am deeply concerned that respect for law must be maintained in this community. Unless Parliament—the maker of laws—gives the highest leadership in the keeping of laws, who else can be expected to do so?

I recall the recent disgraceful flouting of the law at Fremantle. I recall to mind the deliberate incitement of an organised mob to interfere with the rights of law-abiding citizens to go about their lawful business.

On the basis of a study of this incident and its aftermath in court proceedings, I am inclined to believe that a powerful attempt was, in fact, being made to undermine the standing and influence of the Parliament, the Government, and the essential fabric of protective law. This too, will be one of the positions I will be developing in my service in this House. My aim will be to build up the defences of a wonderful community with a long-cherished spirit of mateship, of friendship, and of family concern for the maintenance of basic values.

I call it the spirit of the West. It is a fine spirit. It is reflected in the sound moral values of the majority of our families, where there is not only a degree of proper authority, but also real leadership through personal example; it is reflected in the magnificent spirit of community service, so widely evident; and it is reflected in the natural openness and friendliness of the people in all our communities.

It is not reflected in the bad public example set by adults who flout the law, or who say they will flout the law. Such people never consider what would be the consequence if their example were followed by others who disagree with them and express their attitudes in action. What kind of example is this for rising generations? Do not people care? It behoves Parliament to care.

I would like our Parliament to rise to the status of the highest and most widely respected forum of community discussion on vital issues. I would like it willingly to sacrifice some of its excessive preoccupation with the making of law, in order to give essential attention to the upholding of law. Parliamentary debate should have such a fire and conviction and quality as to arouse public interest, and build public consensus.

I am not advocating a mere “talkfest”. I do not favour the making of speeches in Parliament’s valuable time merely for the purpose of electoral notoriety. I am against contribution being made unless it serves a defensible purpose.

The community is full of unresolved issues, and the Parliament should be giving itself heart and mind to resolving them—recognising that full resolution rests with the higher parliament of public consensus. Here, we should be building that consensus through the quality of debate on vital issues in the forum of Parliament.

A high level of public reportage of parliamentary debate should be the contribution of the public media. Here is a duty that the media should not ignore. The coverage of sensations is not enough. Debate of society’s fundamental values must attract more respect, and I challenge the media to be self critical as well as critical in its coverage of Parliament.

Having said this, however, I want to make it clear that I recognise the basic challenge is to Parliament itself to be relevant—to be part of the community, and not simply a law-makers’ club in an ivory tower on the top of a hill.

I am very concerned for the viability of private enterprise. The economic environment is killing private enterprise with excessive tax, excessive documentation, excessive regulation, excessive procedure, and also excessive slowness in bureaucratic decision making—all adding up to disincentive, not encouragement.

The problem is further compounded by the standover pressures of monopoly unionism, as evidenced at Fremantle recently. This whole situation can and should be laid at the door of Parliament and the Government, and it is our job to correct the faults. We should never forget that when it no longer becomes possible to move from employment to self employment we shall surely be prisoners of a most undesirable system.

Another of my deep concerns is the way our local economy is continually drained and bled of its financial reserves—reserves which could be of enormous benefit to our State. All financial institutions in this State, including the State Treasury, are obliged to hold certain safe reserves of money. They put them to work by placing them safely in various forms of accessible investment so they can be tapped when needed.

Where do they place the reserves? They place them predominantly in the Eastern States money markets; even the State Treasury does this. Quite obviously, we need to respond immediately to the challenge issued on this matter by the Treasurer (Sir Charles Court) who advocated the establishment of suitable financial institutions in Western Australia where we could channel our funds into our development.

I am speaking now not of a few millions, but of hundreds of millions of reserves held by building societies, banks, insurance companies, merchant banks, private companies, and the Treasury. I estimate that we could marshal annually more funds than are committed to the entire loan programme of the Government of Western Australia. At least more than \$300 million would be the figure.

In conclusion, may I add that I am proud to have been elected by my constituents as a member of a Government team firmly committed to take action in these areas of concern. I represent a policy which upholds law and order, and which promises fundamental reappraisal of government and planning. It undertakes to tackle the problems of enterprise, and especially small enterprise, whose leadership understands the key issues facing the community.

I look forward to my period of service in this House. I have already conveyed my congratulations, Mr President, on your appointment to the highest office in this Chamber, but I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you and members for the kindness and consideration shown to me since my election.

I would also like to convey my congratulations to the Hon. Graham MacKinnon on his election as Leader of the Government in this House; to the Hon. Des Dans on his re-election as Leader of the Opposition; to the Hon. Ian Medcalf on his appointment as Queen’s Counsel; and to the Hon. David Wordsworth on his elevation to the Ministry. Congratulations to the new members and those who have been elected to the various committees and positions in this House and in the Parliament.

One final concern I have is that no matter how far one may have advanced in one’s civil vocation or public life, one comes to this Chamber with so much to learn. I hope members will treat this new boy with the tolerance and understanding which he may not deserve, but which he will surely need. Thank you.