



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PAID PARENTAL LEAVE BILL 2010

**PAID PARENTAL LEAVE (CONSEQUENTIAL
AMENDMENTS) BILL 2010**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 31 May 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

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Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (3.58 pm)—I give notice that I will be tabling some amendments to the Paid Parental Leave Bill 2010 to remove the discriminatory aspect from the legislation. Whilst a woman who chooses to further her career in the marketplace and make a wonderful future for herself personally will get tremendous benefit from this legislation, those women who sacrifice themselves to stay at home and give their children a full-time mother will get absolutely nothing out of this legislation.

So the government is very generous to people—whether it is a good thing or a bad thing, and I am not saying it is a bad thing—who wish to further their careers and work in full-time employment. The deputy principal of the high school in Charters Towers resigned recently because she is having a second baby and believes that her children need full-time care. She will move from an income of \$70,000 or \$80,000 a year—something of that nature, I presume—to an income of nothing in order to do the right thing by her children. This bill will give her no benefits whatsoever and no remuneration whatsoever. I have given notice of my amendments, which I will speak to in due course, aimed at extending this benefit so that there is no discrimination in it and a woman who decides to stay at home and look after her kids gets the same decent fair go as some woman who decides that she will instead devote herself to her own interests. Good luck to her. But do not ask that the public purse discriminate in favour of her and discriminate against someone who is so self-sacrificing.

I was asked to do a chapter in a book that was published recently. It was a cookbook, and you did a story on your mother. I made mention of Clyde Cameron, one of the greatest old political warriors that ever set foot in this place. He was a man who, if he went after you, you said your prayers. He was one of the toughest men ever to set foot in this place and one of the most dangerous, and I mean that in a flattering and not a derogatory way. When they were interviewing him on the ABC on a program called *The Confessions of Clyde Cameron*—which comes in the form of a book, and I would recommend that everyone in this House read it—they said ‘you had a very close relationship with your mother’, and his voice broke completely and he staggered through the sentence and said ‘I can’t really talk about my mother’. So here was this hardened old warrior whose mother had been dead for 20 or 30 years, and he could not talk about her. I say to you, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, that 40 years ago my mother died, and I still cannot talk about her. Compare that to a career!

I am of the first generation whose women went on this career path. I know them all. They are the same age as me—that is, in their mid-60s or early 60s. They pursued their career, and now they are old, embittered, lonely people. They have no one to love and no one to love them. I feel very sad for them, and I think that the culture they lived in and the value system that was inculcated in them has left them bereft of all the finer things in life.

I am among those people who come from country areas and owner-operated business backgrounds. My family on my father’s side have been in owner-operated business ever since they came to Australia in the 1870s, and that is true to some degree of my family on my mother’s side as well. Those who know my family know that those businesses have to a very large degree always been run by the women—and run very, very successfully I might add. Those people were full-time mothers who also ran the family businesses and ran them magnificently well. My own family business was run so well—and this is going back a fair bit—that my great-grandad was able to give £3,000 to the general strike in the mid-1890s, which in terms of today’s money is nearly \$1 million. I doubt whether there has been another person in Australian history who has donated \$1 million out of his own money to a strike fund to back the workers because he believed in the cause that they were fighting for, and I say that with very great pride. So those businesses were carried to a very large degree by the mothers who were in them.

Having said all that, I would like to be very specific. There is the most extraordinary lady still alive in Australia. Her name is Lady Pearl Logan. Her husband was knighted, and she has an honorary doctorate from James Cook University. She spent her life on remote sheep and cattle stations, of which her family owned a number. She was the mother, and she was also running the business side of the operations. You could say she made a decision not to have a career, but let us just see what this lady has contributed to Australia. I say that she is the finest lady still living in this country and that nobody could come close to her achievements. She was heavily involved—along

with her husband, who played the main role—in demanding a minimum price scheme for our wool industry, which was virtually vanishing in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In the face of trenchant opposition from a lot of the rich wool growers themselves, two very great men—Sir William Gunn and Doug Anthony—introduced the wool scheme, and for every year for the next 20 years we had a nice increase in the price of our wool. By 1990, more than one-tenth of this nation's income came from wool. Within two years of former Prime Minister Keating's removing that scheme, our incomes had dropped by half, and now there is not much left of that wonderful industry that carried this nation from its very inception until 1990. There is only 40 per cent of it left, and I suspect that over the next 20 or 30 years there will be virtually nothing left of it at all. But let us not revel in the shame of what was done by the free trading policies of the governments of Australia; let us honour the lady who was one of the people instrumental in and responsible for securing the wool scheme. I was there the day that they ripped into Doug Anthony, who was a man big enough not only to take the pain but also to realise that these people were right and he should go back to Canberra and change the world in which we lived.

There was no such thing as equality in education when I was a young fellow in Cloncurry. We did not have the senior high school in Cloncurry. Those of us from well-off families—I would not say that we were rich, but we were well-off by Cloncurry standards—that is, six of the 66 boys and girls my age, had enough money to go away to boarding school. The other 60 got no secondary education. Their opportunities in life were truncated, because people from the country did not get a secondary education. Never mind about a tertiary education; they never even got a secondary education. There was a lot of class warfare in our town because, when the Aboriginal support systems came in to enable them to go away to school, they could afford to go away but a lot of the white fellas could not. The white fellas were very upset and angry about that. This inequality in education meant that over 20 per cent of this country could not get a secondary education because they lived in country areas without secondary education available to them.

Pearl Logan—a wonderful lady—decided that the government should put in some money to make it fair and give everyone an equal opportunity. After all, equality in education is one of the most basic freedoms that one can have in any society at all. One of the many reasons the great Huey Long of the United States was made famous was that he lived in a state where nearly 20 per cent of the population could not read or write and, within four years, he had provided reading and writing skills to some 100,000—arguably 200,000—residents of Louisiana. He instituted systems in the schools so that everyone would be able to read and write in Louisiana. Pearl Logan joined an organisation that was originally called the ICPA. I will not go into the details of political machinations, but what she did was very brilliant and very clever. She got a particular person appointed—an education minister—to the IOU and got him to submit to the Queensland cabinet a proposal for assistance to kids who lived in towns or outside of towns and did not have access to a secondary education. He took it to cabinet and cabinet rejected it.

Pearl Logan had connections with the CWA. She was not Robinson Crusoe. I do not want to make out that she did all of this by herself—far from it—but, if I were to look at who the most important figure in this battle was, I would end up saying that Pearl Logan was. She got over 5,000 telegrams—as we called them then; I suppose we call them faxes now—through the CWA connection to the state cabinet and the Premier. He got so worried about it all that they had a special cabinet meeting at the end of the week and reversed the decision. So we got our foot in the door. After 17 or 18 years of battle, when a child went away to the big boarding schools in Charters Towers—All Souls being the biggest boarding school in northern Australia—the entire cost for the student was met by the state and federal governments as a result of the energies of that woman. Equality in education is one of the greatest freedoms that we should have in Australia. It did not extend to nearly 20 per cent of us who lived beyond the big cities—those of us who did not have access to high schools—but suddenly we were given equal rights to the rest of Australia. What a wonderful contribution to a country.

I had the very great honour of serving in Aboriginal affairs in Queensland for the best part of a decade. I have received very glowing tributes which I did not deserve. Almost every initiative that was taken in those years was taken by the black-fella Australians themselves, not the white-fella Australians. The other person who facilitated that and stood between me and a government which could be brutal on some issues was Lady Pearl Logan. She delivered to those people. She delivered private ownership of their land and she delivered the right to run their own affairs. Both rights were taken off them by successive governments—including the LNP; mostly socialist governments. If I were a socialist I would deeply regret that I was associated with governments that did that. For those who like reading books, there are two textbooks—they are used in university courses throughout Australia: Rosalind Kidd's *The way we civilise: Aboriginal affairs, the untold story* and Frank Brennan's *Land*

rights Queensland style : the struggle for Aboriginal self-management. You can read both of those books. They are a very fine tribute—not to Pearl Logan; she was a facilitator—to the people who drove that agenda.

Having said that, I move on. The Queensland Industry Development Corporation—which was the State Bank—was incorporated when I first came into this House. Pearl Logan decided that the bank should not be a plaything for the rich people, the slithering suits of the cities, like all the other banks were; it should be a bank that performed the duties that a bank should perform: facilitating and growing the real productive capacity of your country and giving people a fair go in times of trial and letting them drive ahead in good times. That is what a bank should do. I was referred to as ‘Pearl’s posse’. She made sure that I was in the driver’s seat with respect to QIDC. One-third of the sugar industry in Queensland would not be there today without the QIDC, and the QIDC would not have been there to help them without Lady Pearl Logan.

People talk about a career. Pearl Logan was a woman who had no career. She did not have enough money—her family were dirt-poor dairy farmers—to go away and get a university education. She did have some tertiary qualifications, but they most certainly did not amount to a university degree. She had to abandon her career to bring up her children and live with the man she loved. He had an obscure property out of Richmond. Did that destroy her as a person? Did that prevent her from achieving great things for this nation? There is no-one who could even get close to her. There is not a person in this nation who could even go close. And I have not finished yet.

There is not a member in this House who has not faced up to the horrific problem of a shortage of doctors in Australia. One of the reasons is that more than half of the graduates coming out of the universities are women—and God bless them. They decide to go out and have children and they stop practicing medicine, to a very large degree. That has resulted in shortages, but that was not the real problem. The real problem was that the existing medical schools, in fairness to them, could not—there were those who argued that they would not—expand. Then they would not allow the building of any other medical schools. There was one medical school built in 44 years in Australia. When I went to see the then minister for health, Michael Wooldridge, he said that the real problem was that we needed a medical school in Townsville. I saw the solution as that as well, but all we got was talk from the government. Then this tenacious lady was appointed chair of the committee. We had been promised by successive governments for 28 years a medical school for Northern Australia, and for 28 years we saw the promises broken. But when this tenacious fox terrier of a lady, in her mid-70s at the time, was made chair it was a different paradigm that we lived in. She was tenacious. I am very proud to say that my daughter was secretary to that committee. For seven years after that committee was formed—seven bitter, bloodthirsty years—they fought the battle and they secured the building of the first medical school in Australia, with one exception, in 44 years. What a magnificent achievement.

Because of the way they approached the problem, seven universities have now walked through the door that this wonderful lady opened. Every year now, there are 1,000 to 2,000 extra graduates pouring through the doors of those new medical schools. We have had the terrible problem of stripping doctors away from countries whose need is more desperate than our own. Time after time and case after case we have run into terrible difficulties bringing these doctors here. God bless them for coming to Australia but, unfortunately, a lot of them have great difficulties with the language, with the culture and also with their training, which in some cases—not all cases—is grossly inadequate. If the problem was solved—and it most certainly was—then this nation has a great debt of gratitude to that lady.

I conclude in my last three minutes on this note: it is not very nice to belong to a vanishing race. If you come back here in 100 years, as Bob Birrell said in a major landmark article in the *Australian* newspaper, there will be not 20 million Australians but seven million Australians. I thought that had to be rubbish, so I rushed off to the library and the demographer up there said: ‘Bob, if the birth rate, or the replacement rate, is 1.7, then when 20 Australians die they are replaced by 17 people. That happens five times in 100 years.’ It is simply mathematics: if you have a birth rate of 1.7, and you have 20 million people, then over 100 years the population will continue to grow to 36 million and then rapidly go into decline. As the baby boomers—the generation that came along five or 10 years behind me—die, they will not be replaced. If 20 of them die, they will be replaced by only 17 people. When my generation dies, we will be replaced. We have replaced ourselves; we have a positive population growth. People say, ‘Our population is not declining, it’s growing,’ but each year the number of net births is exceeded by the number of foreign people coming to this country. You might say, ‘God bless them for coming to our country,’ but they are foreign people; they are not Australians. (*Time expired*)