



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Eureka Stockade Anniversary

SPEECH

Monday, 9 December 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Page 2042
Questioner
Speaker King, Catherine, MP

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Ms KING (Ballarat—Minister for Road Safety, Minister for Regional Services and Local Communities and Territories) (10:55): Last Tuesday marked the 159th anniversary of the Eureka Stockade. On 3 December 1854, in the early morning, the 12th and 40th regiments, along with police troopers, attacked the gold-diggers' stockade. The battle was over in 20 minutes, leaving 22 diggers dead and five troopers killed. At its conclusion the Eureka flag was ripped and torn down. Yet the flag remains today, right now at the heart of the new Museum of Democracy at Eureka.

The Eureka Stockade marked a significant moment in Australia's history. It means many things to different people. It was the beginning of our journey towards democracy. It taught us about the struggle to achieve human rights; the right to a fair go and the right to dignity. More than that, it taught us about the national identity, that equality for all is the backbone of the society; that government should and must act in the interest of its own people. The struggle is epitomised by the words of the diggers who gathered under the flag:

We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other and fight to defend our rights and liberties.

The Eureka Stockade has a unique place in our history books and in the story of our nation. It is testament to the significance of this event that each year thousands of visitors from across Australia and the world walk the Eureka Trail in the footsteps of the gold miners and the diggers.

Earlier this year I was honoured to open the Museum of Australian Democracy at Eureka, which sits on the site of the stockade. It now houses the Eureka flag and the original Ballarat Reform League Charter, the four-page manifesto from the diggers that calls for equal rights, equal representation and equal laws. I am proud that M.A.D.E. will serve as a place of education and of remembrance for that fateful day in 1854, but it is more than the story of Eureka—it is democracy and the debate about democracy that M.A.D.E. represents.

I would like to pay tribute to my colleague the member for Fraser, who gave a stirring lecture at M.A.D.E. last week for the 159th anniversary on the importance of the stockade. I thank him for his continued interest in and advocacy on the importance of the stockade in Australia's history and the significance of the Eureka flag to democracy. The struggle at Eureka against oppression and injustice is one that we in Ballarat are very proud of. It is our heritage. The stockade is our story. It is at the heart of who we are as a nation. Born out of gunpowder and smoke was our journey towards a democratic society.

I end with a quote from Mark Twain:

It was a strike for liberty, a struggle for a principle, a stand against injustice and oppression. ... It is another instance of a victory won by a lost battle. It adds an honourable page to history; the people know it and are proud of it.

Long may we be proud of the Eureka Stockade and all it represents in the development of our democracy as a nation. I would welcome all members, if they get the opportunity, to visit the Museum of Democracy at Eureka, which has a great partnership with the Museum of Australian Democracy, in Canberra. It is a terrific place for children to learn about the Eureka Stockade and about our democracy.