

The Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Jika Jika Province) - I add my congratulations to you, Mr President, to those of other honourable members on your election to your position. I begin by thanking all the Australian Labor Party members in Jika Jika Province who assisted in the campaign for the election of the third Cain Labor government. I owe special thanks to my family for its support and encouragement. I extend thanks also to my wife, Rita, who believed in and supported me throughout. Finally, and most importantly, I thank the electors of Jika Jika who elected me.

The province of Jika Jika that I was elected to represent includes the Lower House seats of Northcote, Preston, Reservoir and Bundoora. It includes a phenomenal mix of period and modern dwellings and outer and inner suburban environments as well as a substantial migrant and working-class content and a significant Aboriginal presence. All of this adds to the character of the province. The area owes its name to the Aborigines and there are still more than 1000 Aborigines in the Jika Jika Province.

The name of Jika Jika was taken from one of the Aboriginal chiefs of the Wurundjeri tribe who signed the "Batman Treaty" when large areas of land were sold to the white man by the Aborigines for blankets, knives and clothing. When one reflects on the current price of housing in the area, one cannot help but conclude that the Aborigines were cheated.

The Labor Party recognises the great injustices perpetrated on the Aboriginal people and our responsibility to redress those injustices. In the 1988-89 Budget the government has allocated \$2.5 million for Aboriginal programs designed to help Aboriginal communities in Victoria achieve a greater degree of self-sufficiency. The government recognises how important cultural identity and awareness is as a factor in re-establishing the pride and dignity of the Aboriginal people. The Budget allocates \$740 000 this year for that purpose.

To a certain extent it is traditional that, during first speeches, honourable members take the opportunity of elucidating the broad political and philosophical axioms for which they or their parties stand. The Labor Party has a rich tradition which draws on the political philosophy of democratic socialism. At a general abstract level, this philosophy and the Labor Party are concerned with adapting the economic, political and social structures of society to extend the humanitarian values of democracy, social justice and peace and to eliminate oppression and exploitation. In short, the Labor Party is trying to make our society more just and equitable. That can occur only when people have reasonably equal access to the opportunities and benefits that our society has to offer.

My view of this is in accordance with that of the great historian and philosopher, R. H. Tawney, who believed that a just society must rest on practical foundations of social organisation and that it is incompatible with the existence of sharp contrasts between economic standards and educational opportunities for different classes.

Conservatism and liberalism are in fundamental conflict with democratic socialism in that they are often used to legitimate basic inequalities in our society. Although in many ways their philosophies are incompatible, conservatives and liberals have had to form an often very uncomfortable alliance against democratic socialism. These marriages of convenience gloss over important policy differences and often occur just after elections. They are, however, susceptible to breaking down due to irreconcilable differences.

What are the differences between conservatism and liberalism? Conservatism as a political

philosophy emphasises the value of, and is therefore concerned with, preserving existing institutions and wealth and power hierarchies in our society. That is justified on the basis of tradition, order or desert. According to Edmund Burke, the father of conservatism, it is only social equals that should be treated equally, and increased liberty or licence for ordinary people can threaten society's structures.

Liberals believe that liberty and the rights of the individual are central to a just society. These noble sentiments, however, are used by them to justify the enormous unconstrained accumulation of wealth and power by some individuals and nonintervention by the State, even when that would be to the clear advantage of the majority of people.

The structural inequalities and social injustices within our society are at base related to economic factors. The Labor Party's political philosophy of democratic socialism is a guide for redressing those inequalities whereas conservative philosophies merely perpetuate them.

Many such structural inequalities exist in Jika Jika Province. Examination of the demography of the area reveals that it is generally disadvantaged in terms of socioeconomic levels compared to other areas of Melbourne. According to the 1986 census, of the 22 electoral provinces, Jika Jika had the second lowest proportion of people with post-secondary education. The area's census recorded unemployment rate of 8.3 per cent is above the Victorian average. Some 73.3 per cent of persons aged fifteen years or more earn less than \$18 000 a year and fewer than 2 per cent earn more than \$32 000 a year. Some 41 per cent of the males and 44 per cent of the females in the province have unskilled occupations as labourers or domestic service workers. Jika Jika is clearly a predominantly working-class area.

Jika Jika also has a great number of migrants of non-English speaking background, and the two largest such groups are Greek and Italian migrants. According to census figures, Jika Jika has the highest proportion of Greek-born persons of any Victorian electoral province and the second highest proportion of Italian-born persons. Some 34.3 per cent of people in the province speak a language other than English at home and, for 62.5 per cent of those people, that language is either Greek or Italian.

It is important to understand the extent to which non-English speaking migrants in our society are trapped in unskilled occupations. Census statistics on a Melbourne-wide basis show that although 14 per cent of Australian-born males and females in the employed labour force have unskilled occupations as labourers or domestic service workers, the proportion for Greek and Italian-born males and females is more than two and a half times that rate.

Three policy areas are of direct relevance to the people of Jika Jika and they are areas in which I and the Labor Party differ significantly from the Opposition. I refer to social justice, economic management and multiculturalism. Social justice in our society comes down to addressing two fundamental issues: firstly, the question of a fairer distribution of what the great philosopher, John Rawls, referred to as primary social values, such as liberty and opportunity. Rawls believed it was a primary responsibility of governments to ensure access for all citizens to liberty and opportunity as a basis for social justice. The Cain government has taken the first step towards achieving that with the introduction of its social justice strategy. The strategy is a real attempt to reorder social priorities to increase participation rates and access to services for the disadvantaged in our community and to protect basic rights, irrespective of class, gender or ethnic background.

The government has boosted social justice spending in this year's Budget to \$60 million, which is more than twice the \$26 million allocated in last year's Budget. This increased emphasis by the Cain government on social justice will bring us closer to the ideal put forward by Rawls.

The second major component of social justice relates to the extent to which our society is able to increase the well-being of its citizens by increasing the amount of the social wage. The social wage is the overall expenditure by the State on such things as social security, education, health, public transport and so on. These are benefits distributed to all citizens, but are of particular importance to workers and the poor.

Increases in the social wage are just as real as increases in other wages and depend on effective economic management of the public and private sectors. The Labor Party is achieving that in Victoria through its economic strategy. It is a mistake, however, to believe—as some conservative economists do—that increases in the social wage are an impost on capital. They are not. Indeed, some studies have suggested that increases in the social wage are directly related during periods of high growth to increased tax revenue from workers and that benefits to capital in the form of capital supporting expenditures by the State also occur during those periods.

It is partly for those reasons that the simplistic conservative economic theories which always seek to reduce *the role of the public sector must be rejected. I reject the new right economic approach of rampant privatisation of profitable public enterprises, and I totally reject the Friedmanite notion that reductions in the public sector can be used to deliberately create a natural level of unemployment to suppress workers' wage demands and ensure high profitability.

I congratulate the Cain government on rejecting that approach as is evidenced by Victoria's low unemployment rate, its high growth and investment rates. I favour the more sophisticated approach of, where necessary, providing kick-starts to the economy through the public sector, of developing Victoria's competitive strengths and of revitalising industry. I support the government's action of establishing one of its six proposed high-technology precincts in the province of Jika Jika. It should help to upgrade older manufacturing methods and to create new jobs.

The third major issue relevant in my electorate is multiculturalism. I begin by noting that the contribution to Australia's economic development by immigrants is immense. Apart from providing their labour power, migrants contribute to economic growth through accelerated consumption patterns as they seek to establish themselves. Also, they introduce new ways of doing things and develop new markets for new products. This is especially relevant in the service industry where a multitude of cuisines now exist; they have enriched our lives.

Despite these economic facts, some conservatives have sought to raise people's fears about multiculturalism by suggesting it threatens social cohesion and leads to ghettos. I recognise that within Liberal philosophy is a tension between those who see multiculturalism as a way of recognising the value of diverse individuals and those who see it as leading to social incohesion or who still believe in the inferiority of other cultures. It is of concern to me that the latter group may be growing in prominence.

The Cain government's approach to multiculturalism is to try to ensure that all people, irrespective of background, can participate fully in our society by funding special community projects, by expanding language services—especially the teaching of English—and by establishing a migrant skills program.

The alternative to multiculturalism is monoculturalism. It is sameness, conformity, intolerance and narrow-mindedness. A monocultural "one Australia" concept is in the end in accord with the social philosophy of the League of Rights.

In the final part of my speech I would like to briefly discuss two further aspects of my role as a Parliamentarian in this place. The great sociologist C. Wright Mills made a very important point about the relationship between private troubles and public issues. He believed the private troubles of people, which they individualise as being peculiar to themselves, often are really social problems therefore, they are public issues. Problems such as stress, non-achievement at school, unemployment, or even the cultural confusion experienced by many migrants are private troubles but are also public issues.

A key role of Parliamentarians is to translate those private troubles, and to bring them forward as public political issues. It is necessary to try to uncover the social causes of many of those ills as well as the political interests which often frustrate attempts to cure them. There is much for me to do in bringing the private troubles and public issues in my electorate to the attention of Parliament.

A second important function of Parliamentarians is to assist in making laws based on moral and ethical judgments which reflect social norms in our ever-changing society. In recent years the demand for us to make such laws has accelerated enormously as we try to come to grips with new technology in such areas as in-vitro fertilisation, organ transplants and dying with dignity in a technological age. Many of those issues have been addressed with great sensitivity by my predecessors, and some who have not been re-elected will surely be missed.

The dying with dignity issue is one that must be tackled as technology increasingly makes it possible for society to keep people alive indefinitely. As you have experienced, Mr President, that issue brings out all the complex ethical questions about quality of life, individual rights, social responsibility and practical implementation.

My position on those matters is shaped by my fundamental belief that the issues are not merely moral but political. We must be aware of the social and cultural consequences of our decisions but we must not lose sight of the political interests which benefit or suffer from them. As Rousseau said, "Those people who treat politics and morality separately will never understand either of them".

Mr President, I shall endeavour to represent the hopes and aspirations of people in my electorate. Again I thank them and members of the Labor Party for the confidence they have shown in me.