

**Senator Dorothy Tangney (13.3.1891 - 1.6.1985)**

**Labor, Western Australia**

**served in the Parliament from 21 August 1943  
until 30 June 1968**

**GOVERNOR-GENERALS SPEECH ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

**24 September 1943**

**Senator TANGNEY** (Western Australia) [11.34II move

That the following Address-in-Reply to His Excellency the Governor-General's Speech be agreed to:

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, the Senate of the Commonwealth of Australia, in Parliament assembled, desire to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign, and to thank Your Excellency for the Speech which you have been pleased to address to Parliament.

I realize the great honour which has been done to me in affording me the opportunity to move this Address-in-Reply. I also realize my great honour in being the first woman to be elected to the Senate. But it is not as a woman that I have been elected to this chamber. It is as a citizen of the Commonwealth; and I take my place here with the full privileges and rights of all honorable senators, and, what is still more important, with the full responsibilities which such a high office entails. I trust that I shall carry out my duties in this chamber with every regard for the dignity and honour of the Senate, and also of the party to which I have the honour to belong.

Addressing myself specifically to the motion, I express my gratitude to those who have rendered our nation so secure as was indicated in the Speech delivered by His Excellency. I pay tribute, first, to the wonderful achievements of our men and women in the fighting forces who in every sphere of action have so gallantly upheld the prestige of Australia. I also pay tribute to the remarkable achievements of our Allies, to the men and women of China who for so many years now have fought our common enemy, to the thousands of Americans who left their homes and came to our assistance in our most critical hour, when, for the first time in the 150 years of our existence as a free nation, we were threatened by a foreign enemy; to our gallant Dutch allies who from our Australian homeland are doing their utmost to drive back the Japanese aggressor to the confines of his own territory; to our gallant kinsmen in New Zealand who, for a second time, have shown that the word Anzac has no hollow meaning but really symbolizes the kinship of blood which unites us and makes the peoples of the Commonwealth and of New Zealand the standard-bearers of freedom in this far-flung outpost of the Empire. The work which has been done by our Allies and the men and women of our forces has been backed up no less by the vast army of industrial workers, both men and women, who, in the past four years, have worked night and day so loyally and well to turn out the sinews of war in order

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that the best human material we have available shall with the best possible equipment bring closer the day of victory.

Particularly, I pay tribute to the women in industry who, for the first time, have been called upon to take their places in fields hitherto the prerogatives of men, especially those engaged in the engineering industry who have turned night into day, and have pursued a way of life completely foreign to anything they had known before. I have seen them at work in munitions factories. I have seen them going on shifts at midnight with the same heroism as has marked the wonderful exploits of our men on the battlefields. I hope that when the day of peace comes what has been so willingly surrendered by our workers in industry will not be forgotten, and that the maximum of what they have voluntarily given up in the war effort will be the minimum upon which our new industrial standards will be based. I do not forget the men and women on the land who with very great inconvenience have toiled from daylight to dark in order that we and the members of our fighting forces shall be fed and our food commitments to our Allies, particularly Great Britain, shall be met. They have done this work in spite of hardships due to unavoidable shortages of material and labour brought about by the war. The people of Australia owe to the people on the land a very great debt.

I pay tribute to the Curtin Government which was called to office at a time of crisis unprecedented in the history of the nation. Under conditions never before paralleled in this country, and with a minority in both Houses, it was still able to call the nation to a total war effort and to co-ordinate the various forces necessary for the success of that effort. We know of the policy of regimentation imposed on the Australian people. Such a policy is absolutely foreign to our normal way of life; the imposing of it upon us must have been most distasteful to any government, and particularly to a Labour Government. However, it was necessary because the times were such as we had never before experienced; and all our man-power and natural resources had to be fully exploited if we were to survive as a free nation. Because of the measures that were taken we are now, as His Excellency remarked, free from danger of foreign aggression; but we are not free from the responsibilities which lie upon all of us to bring to the oppressed peoples of the world the same measure of freedom and democracy as we enjoy, and we must not rest from our labours until that happy state of affairs is instituted. That is why we have a foreshadowing of very heavy taxation because by that way of sacrifice victor will be achieved. Should we feel no greater impact of war than increased taxes, or the rationing of certain goods which we have come to regard as necessities, but which, after all, are luxuries, we should indeed be thankful, because all of us know of the conditions of the peoples in those countries which have been over-run by the enemy. None of us likes to pay taxes but we must realize that the contributions required of us bring nearer the day of victory. We must also remember that the Government which was recently elected by the people of Australia has a twofold duty to perform. First and foremost is the winning of the war, the giving of the maximum possible assistance to our Allies so that peace may be won. But there is also a very heavy responsibility upon the Government to see that the peace shall not be lost. All of us know what happened after the last war; that it was a war to end wars, and would make this country fit for heroes to live in, but instead of Australia being made fit for heroes to live in it became a land for paupers to die in. We must be certain that a similar state of affairs shall not follow in

the wake of this war. Therefore, I put it to the Senate that one of the chief functions of the Government is to work towards a policy to ensure that, once our national safety is assured, the fate of those on the home front will be safeguarded, and we shall build up a democracy on the very best basis that Australia can provide. The last Parliament laid down the foundation of a plan of social services. Social security is the right of every Australian; and I trust that on the foundation already laid we shall be able to build a much stronger edifice which, no matter how fierce the winds of reaction may blow against it, will be able to endure. Thus we shall make this country what it should be, a model for all other democracies to follow. In order to do this we must observe fully the Atlantic Charter. Every citizen has at least two rights—freedom from fear and freedom from want. In order to safeguard those rights the Commonwealth Parliament will need to take over a great deal of work that has hitherto been regarded as the prerogative or duty of the States. If this war has done nothing else it has at least made our people Australia-minded. We are no longer Western Australians, or Victorians, or New South Welshmen. We all are Australians, and we come here with a common duty to perform, not in the interests of any special section of the community, but in the interests of Australia as a whole. We say that Australia is a democracy. I hope that that is true. I believe that if any democracy is to succeed it must be an educated democracy, and its leaders must come from the people themselves. That has been proved over and over again. Therefore, in any scheme of reconstruction, in the new order about which there is so much glib talk but apparently little knowledge we must be certain to put first things first. In this policy of reconstruction we must give, first, social security to all. I understand that a portion of the Government's revenue from income tax has already been earmarked for that purpose. We shall be too late if we wait until the last gun is fired or the last shell has burst before we enter upon this era of reconstruction. We must begin now, and I am pleased to know that provision has already been made by the Government to this end. His Excellency's Speech also gives an indication of further provision to be made for that purpose by this Parliament.

We must have federal control of education, and see that the various State education departments are freed from their present financial worries and enabled to carry out a policy which will give to every Australian citizen the benefits which only education can confer. Help has already been provided by the Commonwealth Government for university students, but the problem of education goes much deeper. The previous Government has done something for kindergartens at the one end of the scale and university students at the other, but the vast mass of our children in between has been left untouched. If we are to achieve anything as a nation, we must tackle education over its whole range, taking care at the same time not to make the system stereotyped. Education is just as vital a part of our defence system as is any portion of the armed services, and in that light it must be considered by this Parliament.

That applies also to our other social services. We have at present a system of pensions which, to my mind, are very inadequate. I do not know how I or any other honorable senator on either side of the chamber could exist on 1 6s. a week, with an odd 6d. thrown in now and again. It is time that pensions were abolished, because we are all share-holders in this vast Commonwealth; there are 7,000,000 of us, and it is the duty of this Parliament to provide that men or women who have given a lifetime of service to the nation shall be given, when they reach pensionable age, not

1 6s. a week as a dole, but their share of the national dividend which they have helped by their labour to create over the years. I hope, therefore, that in this new scheme of social security, adequate provision will be made for those who have reached the eventide of life so that they may enjoy in peace and security those benefits which they themselves have helped to create.

The medical schemes listed under the social service proposals should also be put into operation, because at present only the two extremes of our people are receiving the very best that medical science can give. The very poor receive it as a charity or dole, and at the other end of the social ladder we have those who can work to pay for it, but the people in between, the vast middle class, have to spend the rest of their lives paying for one severe illness. I do not think that the introduction of a system that would assure the best medical attention to all would destroy initiative, or discourage anything that the doctors at present do or could do. We must have a healthy community, and prevention is better than cure. Under present conditions many people delay going to the doctor until it is far too late, because they are afraid of the expense involved. I feel sure that if we had a national system of health this could be obviated. Quite recently I visited a sanatorium for tubercular patients, and was very perturbed and saddened by what I saw there. Many of the patients were young men and women of from 20 to 25 years of age. If we cast our minds back, we will find that they were some of the children who were growing up during the depression years, and in nine cases out of ten their present illnesses must be due to the circumstances which existed at that period, including malnutrition which was a consequence of the miserable dole upon which their parents had to exist, and unhygienic housing, often consisting of only shanties or huts on a river bank, that were unfit to be the habitations of the growing sons and daughters of Australia. That is why so many young people at the present moment are suffering in our sanatoriums. Had they received medical attention earlier, and enjoyed a proper standard of living during their growing years, they would be healthy citizens to-day instead of waiting for the end in institutions.

I therefore hope to see during the life of this Parliament legislation enacted which will remove from all the fear which comes from long protracted illness, and ensure a decent standard of health in our community. We talk a great deal of, and pride ourselves upon, the standard of living which we have reached in Australia, but while our standard of health is what it is, we have no just cause to take pride in our standard of living. I therefore trust that the health measures, foreshadowed in the Speech under the heading of social services to be given to the community during the lifetime of the Parliament will take precedence in the Government's programme.

That brings me to the subject of housing. Our present housing conditions are causing a great deal not only of discomfort but even of hardship to many members of the community. The Commonwealth Bank has now sufficient powers to enable it to help the workers to secure their own homes. By homes I do not mean flats or one-room tenements. I am thinking of homes with gardens to enable families to live in decency, instead of being brought up like rabbits. In any scheme of social service we must be certain that these reforms are introduced, and that our health and education systems and our housing facilities give to the worker, and indeed to every other member of the community, what he has a right to expect. I use the word "worker" in

the broad sense. In Australia, after all, we are all workers. If we are not, we are drones and therefore not wanted. I speak for the vast majority of the people 97 per cent. of them at least who are doing their utmost to build up this nation to what it should be.

The rehabilitation of the men and women of the forces will be perhaps the most important problem which will face this Government, because if those who have offered their lives so valiantly do not return to an Australia which is better than the one they left, their sacrifice will have been in vain. I hope that in this policy of reconstruction we shall build on the very best of what is in the old system, and discard the rest. We must build up so that both men and women who have given their services so loyally during the last four years of bloodshed and carnage may realize, on their return, that they have not been let down by those of us whose walks of life lie in much pleasanter places than those through which they themselves have passed.

I hope that, under the scheme which the Government has already enacted in the Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Act, facilities will be given to the men and women of the forces to take a full share in the improved life of the whole community which we must make sure will follow the end of the war. I do not speak of preference to them, because preference to any section of the community implies a return to the old order of things, in which there was not sufficient for everybody, and only some people were privileged to work. If those conditions are allowed to return, they will be a negation of what we are fighting for. Under this new order there must be justice for all and not preference for any one section.

The Speech does not in itself predict a very great deal for the future, nor does it make very rash and specious promises, because all of us realize that the great task which confronts this Parliament is the same task which confronts the people of Australia that is, to bring this war to a just and honorable conclusion. To this task we must bend all our energies. The way will not be easy, because there is a great deal to be done before not only the Japanese, but also the Germans, are beaten back to the confines of their own lands. When this has been accomplished, we must proceed with the plans which have already been partly put into operation, so that we may give to every man, woman and child in this community the social security which is their birthright. We must also be very careful that those whom we select as the representatives of this nation at the peace conference shall be men and women of integrity because I believe that women should play their part there imbued not with a spirit of revenge but with a spirit of justice, resolved that we and other democracies shall receive even-handed justice at the settlement.

In this respect I should like finally to remark upon the importance of Australia, first as a very vital unit in the British Commonwealth of Nations, and secondly as a vast Pacific power. After this war, things can never be the same as they were before. We are a Pacific nation, and the problems of the Pacific are a special charge upon us in common with the peoples of New Zealand, the United States of America, Canada, China and other Pacific countries. We must make certain that what was done so treacherously nearly two years ago shall never be allowed to recur. The

Government's policy in connexion with foreign affairs must take cognisance of the vital importance of Australia as a Pacific nation.

The financial burdens which the Government of Australia will call upon the people to bear in the next few months will be heavy, by comparison with peace-time requirements, but the times are very difficult and must be faced with courage. I am certain that even when peace comes the present heavy burden of taxation will not be relaxed until we reach that happy stage in which every man and woman who is employable is in productive employment. But it will be ridiculous if a country which can expend 1,500,000 a day for war cannot provide afterwards the money necessary to place its people on a decent economic footing for peace. I fear that for some time at least taxation will have to continue at a high level. The parrot-cry that money can no longer be found should not be raised, or, if it is, it will never again be heeded. When millions of pounds were needed to remove the burden of unemployment, and all its attendant evils, from the people of this community, the money could not be provided, yet it has now been raised for the purpose of defence. Its provision will be just as necessary for the defence of the rights of the people of this democracy when peace has been declared as it is during this time of war. I conclude by expressing the hope that the deliberations of this chamber during this session will be profitable to the Commonwealth of Australia, not only in its own right, but also as a unit of the British Empire.

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