



THE FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

Speech to the Tasmanian Parliament

Guy Barnett

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Madam Speaker, I rise this evening to share some thoughts on the recent election in the United States and the forgotten people. It is a topic close to my heart, as a Liberal member for Lyons, Tasmania's rural and regional heartland, and as someone who worked in a Washington DC law firm in the mid-1980s, acting for Australian clients in agriculture and trade.

Lyons is filled with doers, salt of the earth folk who build and grow productive industries, people who value a straight word and a clear eye. Lyons is filled with community spirit, people willingly volunteering their time and effort to help their communities through sporting clubs, community organisations, churches and others. It is filled with people with family values, values I share and promote. These straight, solid people are the forgotten people to elements of our self-appointed elite.

Increasingly, there are many forgotten people in modern western societies. Sadly, there are many in our community who feel left behind, and as MPs we neglect them at our peril. Those who feel disenfranchised in our own country by rapid, at times, forced social change, often forced on them by the socialist progressives and the elite, those out of touch with the real world. Those who, although living in lands with a long history of free speech, feel shouted down by others with perhaps more power or position and less manners. They feel voiceless, disempowered and neglected.

History tells us that governments and those in power have, at times, a tendency to ignore or trample these people. History also tells us they do so at their peril.

Recently we have seen perhaps one of the greatest object lessons in what happens when the forgotten people are ignored. I am speaking of the recent presidential elections in the United States of America. After years of feeling spoken down to and lectured by the self-appointed elite, millions of ordinary Americans voted for a dramatic about-face in their national government. They were from middle America, regional America. Whatever one's thoughts about president-elect Trump, there can be no doubt he has touched a chord with the forgotten people. He spoke directly to their concerns, whether one agrees with them or not, and motivated them to stand up and engage.

The ultimate insider, Hillary Clinton, was beaten by the ultimate outsider, Trump. I congratulate president-elect Trump, on his election and the Republican Party for gaining a majority in the

House of Representatives and the Senate. A more stunning repudiation of business-as-usual politics could scarcely be imagined. It is a sobering lesson for us in Australia and more broadly. It follows hard on the heels of Brexit, where ordinary Britons voted to leave the European union. Concerned bureaucrats in Brussels were more concerned with process, regulation and the imposition of values, were out of step with their own.

The clear lesson from these events for MPs in Australia is that we must be active in listening to our constituents. We must care. People do not care unless they know you care. We either listen to and engage with ordinary citizens and tackle their concerns or float out to political extremes and risky relevance and electoral oblivion.

I commend the Premier, Will Hodgman, for his words in this vein at the recent Liberal state council. Unlike those opposite, we are focused on the things that matter: jobs, health, education, caring for the vulnerable. In contrast, the Labor Party state council held in Queenstown over the weekend was focused on niche issues, more at home with the Greens: legalising prostitution, so-called reforms around recreational drugs, pill testing, to name a few.

Is Labor trying to out green the Greens? I, for one, will stay focused on the things that matter to the forgotten people of Tasmania: jobs, health, education, strong community, supporting the vulnerable, those with disabilities and those doing it tough. I support forestry, the resource industry, free speech, the right for children to have both a mother and a father. I stand for family values, the importance of marriage in building strong communities.

Yes, I am criticised by the Greens and the chattering classes for holding to these values and standing up for them. The criticisms of the Greens are noticed, but I wear these criticisms as a badge of honour as it means I stand for the things that ordinary Tasmanians care about.

Many who would call themselves liberal would be aware of the famous speech given by Sir Robert Menzies, founder of what eventually became the Liberal Party of Australia on 22 May 1942. In that speech he spoke stirringly of the forgotten people of this country, the people who, in his words, 'are constantly in danger of being ground between the upper and the nether millstones of the false war, the middle class who properly regarded themselves the backbone of this country'. He said further, 'the salary earners, the shopkeepers, the skilled artisans, professional men and women, farmers and so on, these are in the political and economic sense the middle class. They are for the most part unorganised and unselfconscious. They are envied by those whose benefits are largely obtained by taxing them. They are not rich enough to have individual power. They are taken for granted by each political party in turn. They are not sufficiently lacking in individualism to be organised for what, in these days, we call pressure politics. Yet, as I have said, they are the backbone of the nation.' That is what Sir Robert Menzies said. While he was speaking in particular of the middle class, I believe that his sentiments are relevant to modern day Tasmania.