



Speech by  
**Mr TERRY SULLIVAN**  
**MEMBER FOR CHERMSIDE**

Hansard 9 November 1999

**JUBILEE 2000 CAMPAIGN**

**Mr SULLIVAN** (ChermSIDE—ALP) (12.20 p.m.): I rise to support the international campaign known as Jubilee 2000, which addresses the unjust burden of debt being carried by many of the least empowered people on this earth. Jubilee 2000 is a practical, achievable act of social justice that can remove the unfair debt burden from those societies that are benefiting least from this world's bounty. Presently, the 92 poorest nations in the world are indebted to the amount of approximately \$2,239.7 billion. In 1997, these countries had a combined GDP of \$6,481.1 billion and comprised more than two-thirds of the world's population. About half is owed directly to individual Governments—mainly Japan, the US, Britain, Canada, France, Germany and Italy. Most of the rest is "multilateral" debt—owed to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which are effectively run by the G7 governments. About 10% is owed to private banks.

The history of recent burgeoning Third World debt begins in the 1960s when the United States Government was spending more money than it earned. To make up for this, the US President decided to print more dollars, impacting heavily on the major oil-producing countries, whose oil was priced in dollars. In 1973 the OPEC nations increased the price of oil. Their resultant massive profits were deposited in Western banks. As interest rates plummeted, the banks were faced with an international financial crisis. They lent out the money fast, to stop the slide, and turned to Third World nations whose economies were doing well but who wanted money to maintain development.

Banks lent lavishly and without much thought about how the money would be used or whether the recipients had the capacity to repay it. For their part, Third World Governments were pleased to take advantage of loans at very low interest rates—below the rate of inflation. Some countries, like Mexico and Venezuela, took out loans to repay previous debts. Many had intended to use the money to improve standards of living in their countries. Unfortunately for the poorest citizens of these countries, in the end, little of the money borrowed benefited the poor. Across the range of borrowing nations, about one-fifth of it went on arms, often to shore up oppressive regimes. Many Governments started large-scale development projects, some of which proved of little value. All too often the money found its way into private bank accounts.

One of the worst examples of this occurred in the Philippines when, in 1975, the corrupt President Ferdinand Marcos borrowed \$2.3 billion to build the Bataan power station. It was completed in the mid 1980s, but was condemned by a team of international inspectors who declared it to be unsafe because it was built on an earthquake fault. It has not produced one watt of electricity. It is estimated that Marcos received more than \$80m in commissions. His crony who organised the commissions now lives in a castle near Vienna. Meanwhile, the US company that built the power station, Westinghouse, continued to make the profits as succeeding Philippine Governments have paid \$100,000 a day to repay the debt. Throughout the years, the barefooted kids who live on the rubbish tips of Manilla have paid for that debt through lives of poverty, receiving no education or health care, which has resulted in their greatly shortened life span.

Even as Third World countries were signing up for billions of dollars in loans, interest rates began to rise, pushed further by an increase in US interest rates. Oil prices rose again. Third World countries were earning less than ever for their exports and paying more than ever on their loans and on what they needed to import. They had to borrow more money just to pay off the interest.

What is the practical, achievable, just solution that is proposed? It is called "Jubilee 2000". Jubilee 2000 is a global campaign to cancel the so-called "unpayable" debts of the world's poorest countries by the end of 2000. The Jubilee 2000 campaign considers debts to be unpayable if their repayment would cause widespread hardship and suffering. The present situation in Mozambique is cited as an example of unpayable debt, where the Government spends 3% of its money on health, 8% on education, and 33% on paying debts.

A great deal of support for the Jubilee 2000 campaign has come from a cross-section of religious groups. The impetus for this arises from interpretations of passages in the Old Testament that espouse the Jubilee principle of restoring justice and fairness to societies that had fallen short of God's ideal. It called on the people to celebrate every 50—or, in Deuteronomy, every seven—years with the cancellation of debts, the return of land to its original owners and the freeing of slaves. The aim of the Old Testament Jubilee was to provide a new start with better economic systems and fairer ways of living, so that next time around injustice would not creep in so readily. As a politician, I would certainly take notice of a petition with a thousand signatures. Leaders of developed nations, therefore, should note that the Jubilee 2000 petition has over 17 million signatures from 120 countries. As well, full Jubilee 2000 campaigns are in place in over 50 countries.

I will now consider briefly the Left and Right of politics to determine who needs to be convinced that this type of change is needed to be carried out. Most Left Wing political movements affirm positive support for those in greatest need. In fact, most Left Wing political parties have their origins in the struggle of the poor and the oppressed to gain some measure of social justice. Most Left Wing politicians support a stronger role for the intervention of Governments in the economic and fiscal processes in order to redistribute wealth more evenly among their citizens. Where do Right Wing Governments and politicians from countries like mine stand? Unfortunately, in the last decade, we tended to follow the lead of British and American leaders who vigorously promoted the cause of economic rationalism. Western nations have tended to let the market decide. We must realise that it is not an inanimate thing called "the market" that decides, but well educated, well fed, well-paid individuals who make decisions that control the financial markets around the world. We talk about "free enterprise"—even though we know it is not free. We know there are winners who make the profit and losers who gain very little from the global economic processes. I submit, therefore, that it is Right Wing Governments and politicians who need to be convinced of the need for a change and need to be convinced that debt relief or debt forgiveness should be implemented. If debt relief or debt forgiveness is to become a reality, it will have to be introduced by the very industrialised nations that are the greatest lenders to poorer, indebted nations.

Because of my background as a member of this developed Christian nation, I will direct my next comments to the role of Western, Christian nations such as Australia. Traditionally, western democracies have claimed a separation of Church and State. The reality is that there has always been a link between the dominant religious force in a society and politics. Political parties naming themselves "Christian Democrats", for example, could hardly claim to be separating Church and State. Nevertheless, Governments are fond of claiming that separation.

In recent years, the deliberate, overt involvement of churches in matters of State within Western democracies has become obvious. The most glaring example is in the United States where fundamentalist, Right Wing Christian groups have taken control of the political agenda. The Christian Coalition movement has been the dominating influence in the American Republican Party over this past decade. They have determined who would be candidates and what political policies would be promoted in the US election campaigns. Many State legislatures are captive of that political, Right Wing Christian movement. To a lesser extent, the influence is growing in the creditor nations, other than the US, to which I have referred. So I want to appeal to Right Wing religious activists to consider their position, to follow their religious teachings closely and, in so doing, forgive the debt to poorer nations. My criticism of those church-based movements is that they are very selective in what religious principles they choose to follow. They claim to be Christian. They claim to follow the Bible as it is printed—following a fundamentalist interpretation of the Scriptures. But they do not do what they claim they do. They focus only on certain limited aspects of what the Bible says—in particular, what are called the "sexual sins".

I have spent some time detailing that movement, because it is gaining influence in the very western nations that need to forgive the debt of poorer nations. We must challenge them and ask why they do not focus on other aspects of the Bible. Why do they not give the same emphasis to practising what is proclaimed, for example, in Leviticus 25, Numbers 4, Ezekiel 46, Deuteronomy 15, Isaiah 61, or Luke's Gospel chapter 4? Why do they not blow the "jobel", the ram's horn, and proclaim a Biblical year of Jubilee when forgiveness of debt is practised?

The Jubilee 2000 campaign call for debt forgiveness for poorer nations has its rationale firmly rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures. As well, the New Testament is full of references that proclaim help for the poor, the special place in God's plan for the underprivileged, punishment of those who afflict the poor, the poor being rewarded and the obligation to share with the poor. Those Christian nations that are the greatest creditors should, if they follow the Christian principles espoused by many of their voters, be leading the way in debt forgiveness.

Throughout the last few centuries, we have seen the United States, Great Britain and Germany either default on debt or be the beneficiaries of debt forgiveness from other nations. It is now time for those nations to take a leading role, to show the same compassion for Third World countries today. There are many other aspects to this topic that could be added to this speech. Further reference could

be made to those nations that have benefited from debt relief or that have simply defaulted on their loans, but time will not permit.

When we ask ourselves whether debt relief would be effective in addressing world poverty, we realise that the answer is: a resounding yes. I say that not just because a defined amount of financial indebtedness would have been retired from those nations. The very act of debt forgiveness would indicate that we developed nations have had a change of heart. It would mean that nations such as Australia have turned from worshipping the almighty dollar and have started to look at each person on this planet—especially those who are in need—as our universal brother and sister. The debate on debt relief is not really about economic theories or monetary policies; it is not an academic debate. The debate is about what is in our hearts as human beings. We are only truly human when we are whole people, and we are only whole people when we consider people's feelings, emotions and aspirations as well as their rational thoughts. We human beings are not just a brain on two legs—a mobile intellect developing ideas; we are people with feelings, with emotions of love and anger, jubilation and despair. We laugh, we cry, we fight and we make love.

This debate is about the type of human being each one of us is to become. Jubilee 2000 challenges us to be not just thinking, rational, logical human beings but also compassionate, loving, forgiving, generous people who share what we have with our universal brothers and sisters. Let us forgive debt. Let us work to eradicate poverty. Let us support the Jubilee 2000 campaign.

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