



Speech by

**LIDDY CLARK**

**MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD**

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Hansard 4 April 2001

#### **FIRST SPEECH**

**Ms LIDDY CLARK** (Clayfield—ALP) (3.10 p.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to dedicate this, my inaugural speech to the House, to the memory of Johnno Mulock. Johnno would have been 40 years old this year. I am aware that some honourable members might never have heard of him. Johnno was an actor, but he certainly was not a famous actor. He never got the big break, never won a Logie let alone an Oscar, never even had a regular gig in *Home and Away* or *Neighbours*, but Johnno was respected and admired by all who knew him. He was a total professional, a man who understood the meaning of commitment and perseverance. Like many of his peers, I looked up to him.

Johnno grew up in a happy, political household. His father, Ron Mulock, was the Labor Deputy Premier of New South Wales during the Wran government—and I have no need to remind members of the successes Wran achieved with regard to women's welfare, child care, public housing and the much-needed services for migrant women.

Perhaps that is why, when announcing my intention to put away my theatrical make-up box and enter the world of politics, Johnno raised his voice above the giggles and snorts to offer me his unbridled support. 'If anyone can do it, you can!', he said. 'Just remain committed to the cause and persevere, Liddy, persevere.' Johnno's words have sustained and supported me from that day to this—commitment and perseverance. How I wish he could be here to share this day. Johnno Mulock was a rare friend. He is truly missed. I miss his wisdom.

When I was a working actor I was often interviewed by the press—we are talking *TV Week* here, not the *Bulletin*—and I was often teased by my mates for the predictable answer that I always gave to one of their stock questions. 'And what do you feel passionate about, Miss Clark?', a journalist would ask. 'Social justice,' I would reply, 'and Australian Rules football!' Since those heady days, many things have changed in my life, but not those two facts. I am still passionate about social justice and football, only now—with at least one passion—I stand a very good chance of kicking a goal.

You see, Mr Deputy Speaker, I have never been a person to sit back and let life happen to me. Show business is a very tough call at the best of times, and I learnt early in my career to fight for what I thought was right and fair. My theatrical record—as an actor, director, casting consultant and vocal coach—proves my need to be totally involved in what I do. But right from the start of my theatrical career, there was always another pull. While fellow actors sat backstage and talked about character development and costume fittings, I was usually found pondering the latest union issue.

The politics of my profession were of great interest to me and when I decided to go on, shall we say, long service leave, I had the fortune and the privilege of being an adviser to the Arts Minister, the Honourable Matt Foley. Thank you, Matt, for that opportunity. To continue my education for greater things, I moved from arts adviser to industrial officer with the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance. Anthony Lennon, thank you so much for giving me the opportunity. It was a short but very sweet journey, and I learnt a great deal.

I think that most people do not want to think of actors as being ordinary, hardworking and decent people, which they are in most cases. That kind of image breaks the illusion. The next time you watch the Logies, try to remember that quite a few of those glittering guests had to

borrow money to be there. People are also stupidly fond of asking actors if they have a 'real' job. Believe me, many wish they did. There simply is not enough 'pretend' work to go around.

The 'Do you have a real job?' question is one that never ceases to irritate me. Why is it that so many people think acting is nothing more than a hobby? Did you ever notice how people refer to the small handful of very famous, money-in-the-bank actors as lucky? That must mean that the rest of them are unlucky, and when you consider that 90 per cent of our well-trained professional actors are out of work at any given time, I guess they are.

When I made my step into 'real' politics, I felt it was a natural progression. I had joined the Labor Party because of its principles, its philosophy, and I believe in the Labor Party philosophy more and more. I also believe in Peter Beattie's Labor government agenda for reform, for a strong and innovative education system and for a state economy built on the industries of the 21st century—a Smart State!

I am just a hardworking girl on a mission—a woman who has been given the chance to make a difference in this troubled world and one who is willing to make sacrifices along the way in order to achieve those goals. I never expected to win the seat of Clayfield. No-one thought I would win it. Clayfield had sat snug as a bug in the conservative heartland for over a hundred years. Think about that. Over a hundred years!

But although the election was an historic one, I would never lie to myself about why I won the seat. The point is I did, and I am aware of how important it is to prove myself worthy of the people's trust. I will do this by remembering the lessons I have learnt in the past, by being well prepared and well informed, by using my actor's skills as an active listener and by being accessible, by immersing myself in issues of concern—which, as it turns out, takes me out of the theatres and onto the race track.

Clayfield is an interesting electorate. It has areas of wealth mixed in with areas of lesser advantage. People in Pinkenba are living in an industrial zone with the problems that proximity brings. However, the local school is still thriving after 126 years. Residents and businesses of Nundah and Wavell Heights are suffering the inconvenience of the cut and cover. The thing about Clayfield, though, is that they all come together at the racecourses and the Albion Park Paceway. The racing industry is a huge employer in the area and, in many ways, is the heart of the electorate.

One of the most exciting industrial and trade development precincts in Australia, the Australia TradeCoast, is also in the electorate of Clayfield, located in and around the Brisbane Airport and the port of Brisbane. The Beattie government's aim is to establish this as a global logistics and manufacturing hub for the Asia-Pacific area.

The electorate of Clayfield has been very well served by its returning officer for many years—including the two elections that I contested in 1998 and 2001. I would like to pay tribute to Mr Milfin and his staff. When I reflect upon the debt that we, as a community, owe to the Queensland Electoral Commission and to the thousands of workers who give us a fair and impartial electoral process, I am deeply grateful. This is something we tend to, but should never, take for granted.

In the parliament and on the hustings we tend to be aware of those things that separate us as parties and individual politicians. These differences are, however, almost trivial when compared with the magnificent fact that we are here because the citizens of our state voted and their votes were fairly counted, and the even greater fact that, in three years, the citizens will vote again and their votes will again be fairly counted, and those of us who are deemed to have lost will take our disappointments—pick up our bat and ball, if you like—and, accepting the result, go elsewhere, notwithstanding our keen awareness of our own use-by date!

Although democracy may be something that we take for granted, we should never stop praising the people whose integrity makes it possible every three years. One has only to reflect upon those generals and dictators throughout history who have stopped at nothing to hold on to power to know what an extraordinary thing this is.

I want to pay tribute to those workers from all parties who, as they hand out how-to-vote cards, engage in good-natured debate; who greet one another warmly each election; who, by scrutineering, also contribute to the integrity of the process; and who also accept the result on each occasion, with its associated joy or disappointment, with good heart.

It would be remiss of me, with such a captive audience, not to acknowledge and extend my gratitude to the people who have supported me during the campaign. Barrister-at-law and campaign director extraordinaire, Mr Stephen Keim, and Denise, who welcomed me into their fabulous family with open arms and their humour and intelligence was a very special gift indeed. Cathy—with a 'C'—Kirkness, Jack Hill and their family also opened their hearts and home to me. They are wonderful people and deserve my heartfelt thanks. Hi Anne Louise! A zillion thanks to

the team, to the branch members, to Young Labor and to the volunteers. I would also like to pay homage to the custodians of the land where the electorate of Clayfield sits. A huge thankyou to Maureen, Lila, Eunice and April. They held a cleansing fire ceremony at the Clayfield electorate office and I felt—and I still feel—hugely humbled and honoured by the ritual! It certainly was an evening of balance and celebration.

To my mum and dad, who probably thought an Oscar would have been more achievable than my standing here today as a member of the Queensland parliament, thank you for your constant love and support. Dad is here today. Unfortunately, my mother could not make it; she is in Sydney undergoing a medical procedure. My sister and brother-in-law are in country Victoria and my brother is somewhere running around running Queensland Tourism. To my adorable cousin Kevin from Sydney and John Woden, who are with the rest of my friends in the gallery—howdy—you all know how important your friendship and love is to me. To my mates south of the border, if anyone asks you if you have ever worked with me—that is after they ask you if you have a real job, of course—tell them that you have met me a few times and that I was quite boring. To Miss Jane, the Clayfield electorate officer, who is also in the gallery today—Jane and I have embarked upon this new journey together and it is fantastic that she is here; her father is almost at peace at Mount Olivet at the moment and she has taken time to come from his bedside to be here today, and Jane, that is fantastic—I adore you; I love you; thank you.

I would also like to acknowledge those who have gone before me—the men and women who over the decades have made a commitment to stand in Clayfield. Mention must be made of Brian Sams and Jim Keim and their families who have been tireless supporters of the Labor for Clayfield push, the Labor Party and the fundamental democratic process.

Finally, I would like to thank the voters. I will do my best not to disappoint you. As the elected representative for the people of Clayfield and beyond, I will be their conduit to the policy makers. I will uphold the debate and, as a parliamentarian, I will be able to put into practice the Labor tenet of supporting all peoples for social justice and a fair Queensland.

Years ago when I lived in Sydney, my actor friends and I used to say that if we were ever down and out, we would move to Queensland, go on the dole and sleep on the beach. It actually made good sense, for you would not want to be down and out in a Melbourne winter. Queensland, as we all know, is beautiful one day and perfect the next. We all thought ourselves very amusing at the time, but there is a thin sliver of fate between a good joke and a bad break. Homelessness, as you know, is no laughing matter. It is a complex problem that all too easily affects people of all ages.

I and many other women in the parliament today owe a debt of gratitude that these issues were put on the agenda some 26 years ago. In 1975 Gough Whitlam introduced a homeless persons assistance program to the nation. It ran into trouble as it had not been set up to encompass the needs of women who suffered from domestic violence. Then along comes Queenslander Barbara Wertheim, a feminist involved in the setting up of the Brisbane Women's Centre. Her advice on the best way to establish much-needed women's refuges proved invaluable. 1975—a year when our nation's severe shortage of women in political positions stood out like flared trousers; a year like this year, in effect. Barbara Wertheim was a feminist, not a politician, yet she travelled to Canberra on a regular basis after becoming a member of the International Women's Year secretariat and climbed the stairs over a suburban Chinese takeaway to get to their little headquarters. The year 1975 was a challenging and difficult year for Australian women. It was also International Women's Year, and Gough Whitlam hoped to change attitudes and lessen the areas of discrimination by asking his ministers and Premiers to prepare programs that would help improve the status of women in Australia.

But Gough Whitlam's International Women's Year aroused the anger of the press. His top female adviser was advised to 'stand still for a moment and stop wobbling under that T-shirt'. On 1 January the *Age* newspaper ran a headline that screamed 'Two million dollars for the sheilas'. Underneath this banner in smaller letters were the words, 'Surprisingly, it's not a joke!' The *Sunday Telegraph* called International Women's Year 'the year of the bird'. Another paper referred to it as the 'big yak-yak', and on subsequent days and weeks and months Gough Whitlam was repeatedly condemned for being wasteful and incompetent. His adviser on women's affairs, Elizabeth Reid, was simply persecuted. 1975—26 short years ago.

Recently, I was not surprised to read that during the seventies women involved in the women's movement were more likely to vote Labor than Liberal. Did you know that if we gathered all the world's government ministers in one place, only seven per cent of them would be women and that most of that number would be employed in the social areas of government? Men dominate the areas of finance and decision making—they always have in this country—but in Vietnam a quarter of the seats are occupied by women.

Real change is either extremely slow or terrifyingly fast, as shown by the recent state election and the 40 per cent of women who now make up the Labor caucus. As a member of Emily's List, I have worked hard to support women into parliament in Australia, but I do not consider my role to solely campaign for more women in parliament. Although it is a subject I support wholeheartedly—as I have always said, 'A woman's place is in the House!'—I am here to present my position, to promise my commitment to my government and my constituents. As loyal as I am to the sisterhood, I want to make clear my intention of watching over the women and men voters in my area, because only by working together can we successfully build a better community.

I would also like to involve the youth of Clayfield, give them a sense of pride about who they are and how much they can improve their environment by taking an interest in where they live. We all want a happy and secure future, but as any good actor will tell you, to achieve that one needs a well-researched rehearsal period. And what about the fun times? There is always Aussie Rules football, of course. Have I transferred my allegiance to the Brisbane Lions? Maybe, maybe not, but I sing—

We are the pride of Brisbane town  
We wear the maroon, blue and gold.

Maybe it will depend on whether or not they win the flag. You see, I am on a winning streak myself. My precious free time had better be interesting.

Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for the time given to me today. I am privileged and honoured to be a member of the class of 2001 in this, the sitting of the 50th Queensland Parliament.

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