




Speech By
Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Record of Proceedings, 22 October 2019

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Theodore, Mr EG

 **Hon. SJ HINCHLIFFE** (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (2.51 pm): I rise today as Queensland's multicultural affairs minister to acknowledge that 100 years ago today Edward Granville Theodore, our first premier from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, ascended to that role. His father, Vasile Teodorescu, numbered among Australia's first Romanian immigrants. 'Red Ted', as he became known, is one of the most influential and impactful Queenslanders, full stop; one of the most extraordinary Queenslanders, full stop. In 1882, Vasile, son of a Romanian Orthodox priest, met Annie Tanner on the ship to Australia. She had been a child labourer in the hellish Lancashire cotton mills. Surely his parents' experiences informed Edward Theodore's own leadership of Australia's organised labour movement.

Born in South Australia in December 1884, his fortunes were tied to his parents' until he was 12 years old, when school ended and his working life began. In 1900 he was on the Western Australian goldfields and by 1903 he was calling the mines of South Australia home. Three years later outside of Cairns when Theodore was mining and prospecting he became the voice of organised labour in Far North Queensland. In 1907 he helped establish the Amalgamated Workers' Association of North Queensland and was instrumental in its merging with the Australian Workers' Union in 1913. He was to become its state secretary and the driver behind both the AWA's and the AWU's affiliation with the Labor Party.

By 1915 politics had become his true passion and he was part of the team that ousted Liberal premier Digby Denham. Under TJ Ryan he was made deputy premier and treasurer and was the natural choice as successor in 1919 when Ryan entered federal politics. At the time of his becoming premier—as I said, 100 years ago today—Theodore is described in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* as cutting 'an impressive figure. Wide-shouldered, deep-chested, thick-necked and almost six feet tall, he might have been a rugby front-rower.' I hear that Country might have used him last evening.

Theodore's legislative legacy is impressive and intensive and includes: introducing the first Labor Exchange Act in 1915 to address unemployment; introducing the Fair Rents Act in 1920 to regulate the private rental market and create the Fair Rents Court for tenant disputes; introducing the Main Roads Act in 1920 to provide for the construction and maintenance for our roads with a view to Queensland's development; abolishing the Legislative Council through the Constitution Act Amendment Act 1922—an enduring reform; setting judges' retirement age at 70 years in the Judges' Retirement Act 1921—another enduring reform; and providing unemployment benefits, travel assistance and technical training for unemployed workers through the Unemployed Workers' Insurance Act 1922.

Theodore resigned as premier in 1925 to seek federal office. In Canberra he rose to serve as federal treasurer, only to have his opportunity to respond to the Great Depression in his way cut short by the Mungana affair. Then the world of publishing beckoned and, with Frank Packer, Consolidated

Press was born publishing the *Australian Women's Weekly* which was printed on the AWU's Sydney printing press. Theodore served his nation, chairing the Civil Construction Corps during the Second World War directing key infrastructure workforces to support the war effort.

While he was keen to be seen in so many ways as a 'proper' British subject, the reality is that his injection of diversity was what Queensland needed. He is a great example of someone who came from simple beginnings, but he was able to use collective action, working with his comrades—I use that term advisedly—to achieve great ends and the great, enduring reforms that still serve this great state to this day. I think it is appropriate that we acknowledge this centenary.