

Philip Ruddock

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Can I just first acknowledge our Master of Ceremony, can I say it's unusual to say this Reverend, ladies and gentlemen, has a nice ring to it. Can I say ladies and gentlemen, it's a real pleasure to be with you and to be here with Heather to night and participate in this forum, it's not the first occasion I've been here and it's good to be back. I've been asked to talk about my self, it's something that I find fairly difficult to do and I will try and make it light but you'll excuse me if I do seem to be somewhat self engrossed it's because I've been asked to speak about my time as a member of the House of Representatives.

The first point I would like to make in relation to my continued service in the parliament is that at the last election I might acknowledge I think one of my erstwhile opponents from the last election is here tonight. I stood to be the member for Berowra and people had the confidence in me to re-elect me. And I feel that it is my responsibility; I didn't stand to be Attorney General; I would have liked to have been Attorney General, but I sought election to the parliament and I was elected. And while some see fit if they don't get re-elected to government to move on. It's not my view. And it's interesting I was yesterday in the Press Club in Canberra. Some of you may have noticed just last night I had some observations to make about the American election and I was with Malcolm McCaress, he has pendulum for the American elections as well ours. But he did say and I thought that it was complimentary, that he regards it as that when you are elected; you fulfill your responsibilities.

Um, I must say I never really expected to be a member of parliament for 35 years. And there may be an element of accident related to it. I've told people from time to time that my profession strictly is as a legal practitioner. I studied law, I didn't study law to see how as a judicial officer I might be able to make the law; I always aspired to be in the parliament because in my view the people ought to be able to hold accountable those who are responsible for legislating for them.

I do have a great deal of affinity with my late father; he was a great mentor. There are some people in this room tonight who knew him well. One lady in particular whose family were very much engaged in my first

pre-selection, knew my father long before that. I might say there is also my neighbor from Bellamy Street; Pennant Hills but that's another matter. She's known me since I was eight years old. But, my father was a great mentor. Those who knew him ah knew he saw politics as a vocation where service to the community that you represent is first and foremost. He risked his political career at times, over such mundane matters as the approval of service stations. There was a time when they weren't closing them down, they were opening them up and sometimes people would of, would want to develop them in nice residential leafy locations. Ah and when people protested about that to Daddy he often to the cause up.

He was once approached by the Treasurer of the Liberal Party and said, "Why are you opposing this particular development?" Our friends, and I think he must have been referring to donors, didn't particularly like it and he said well "their proposals are adverse to the interest of my constituents and if they really want to help us they should discontinue it.", I thought it was fairly courageous but he was a person who had very strong views about the nature of government. His philosophical approach is one of the points I wanted to make to you tonight.

I was born in Canberra there's nothing recipient about that. It's just that my father happened to be a senior public servant. His responsibilities were as the (when he retired at a relatively young age) Deputy Prices Commissioner. People may not be aware that during the war, for the purposes of ensuring that resources could be harnessed for the war effort, very extensive controls were imposed. And he was responsible for fixing the prices of agricultural products, newspapers, petroleum products. He had enormous authority as a bureaucrat and the one thing it convinced him of is that, that level of management; that coercive management by government was not good for the people.

It made him an avowed opponent of socialism and of course socialism was a dogma that the Labour Party (strictly in it's platform, even today) still holds. And he was one who said to me at a very early age that (and I think it applies as much today as it did then) that in government you should have in mind how you can bake a bigger cake. Because our opponents are only really interested in how you cut it up. And I think there is a very significant in have a degree of responsibility which is rooted in our philosophies. Not as marked as they were, I might say,

that's one of the shifts that we've seen over time as the Labour Party has moved away from its socialist roots and its dogma on those matters. And where the choices that you make become much more narrowly cast.

But for me I never really expected to win Parramatta in 1973. I was putting my hand up to say that I may at some stage in my career I may be interested in politics. I had, and I don't think parties see this these days, 30 opponents for pre-selection. One of them was the husband of the present New South Wales Governor, Sir Nicholas Shahadie. There were a number of judges, they weren't judges at the time, they were later appointed so. A number of silks, prominent business people and a pool of others. I was the young Liberal president. I won because my closest opponent allowed somebody else to prepare his speech for him. I am told the speech was brilliant, absolutely brilliant, he read perfectly and then some people asked him questions about it and he knew nothing about the topic.

I won that day because there was an expectation there may be in a hotly contested bi-election some television programs, and I did go before Mike Willesse, I can remember it. With Mike Wheelan who was the Labour candidate, and we were tested on issues and it was really the extent to which you could think on your feet under pressure that became the basis of which that pre-selection was determined. I told you earlier that I was a legal practitioner, I was a partner of a Sydney law firm at a relatively young age and I might say I didn't sever my association with my old firm until I became a minister. Didn't mean I did any legal work; I think I glorified under the title 'Consultant'. But I've recently been granted 'life membership' of the Law Society of New South Wales having been a member of that august body for over 40 years. The point of the story is I always kept a practicing certificate because I never knew when I might have to go back.

I made the point that I would not have expected to have been there as long as I have been. That's more a coincident of circumstance and I propose to use the coincident of circumstance to tell you a number of stories and I have the points reasonably well taken about long liberty. I'd been elected in 1974, which was the first election in which Gough Whitlam agreed to a double dissolution. I was elected again in the second double dissolution which Gough Whitlam didn't agree to. The

occasion of the dismissal. There was an attempt of redistribution of electoral boundaries between 1974 and 1975 by Fred Daley, and he had in fact planned to do what had been in my mind that somebody might plan to do and that was to create a blue ribbon Liberal seat out of what was Mitchell and Parramatta, essentially linking Epping with Castle Hill. The Senate knocked it out. But later a redistribution occurred in 1977 and essentially Parramatta was turned on its head and went out to Blacktown, and a new seat called Dundas carved out the residue of Parramatta, east of Rydalmere, but was still a relatively marginal seat.

I stood for the Pre-selection for Dundas, a number of people took the view that Parramatta was my seat; I should stick by it, even though it was only about 20% of my constituents, and give some new candidates an opportunity in Dundas. So that was my first contested party pre-selection. The second was referred to in the C.V that has been distributed to you; in 1988 there was an issue, which was quite significant. It was debate about immigration within the Liberal Party and whether or not given elements of social cohesion and maintaining social cohesion migration from particular parts of the world should be slowed down. In other words, whether you could have a racially discriminatory approach to migration.

I had become, at earlier points in time, a shadow minister for immigration. I had some strong views on immigration being non-discriminatory in terms of country of origin and race, and I crossed the floor to vote on a motion proposed by the then Prime Minister Robert Hawke that acknowledged that the 'White Australia Policy' had been abandoned by Harold Holt, that there were elements of selection for migration that probably should occur but that race, country of origin, religion and like factors should not be among them. And then in the end, after some "politicking" you had to vote for or against that proposition and I couldn't vote against that proposition. I thought it was going to bring an end to my parliamentary career. And the reason is quite clear, if you are seen on a major issue of principle to be opposing your leader some people take that into account in judging whether or not you can continue to make a contribution.

In 1988, this vote occurred about a month and a half before the party was seeking nominations for the subsequent election. We had a huge party convention, it was held in the old Hilton Hotel and Heather will

remember it well and John Howard came into the convention and said “In our party, people are entitled to exercise their conscience and to vote, if they wish on a matter of conscience, contrary to the party whip”. And as he looked down at Heather and me sitting down in the front row and said “and the party has an opportunity to take that into account at the time of pre-selection”. I won the endorsement 43-6 and I think one of the reasons I was chosen to be immigration minister by John Howard was to put it very clearly, beyond doubt, that what ever other decisions you may take about the size of the migration program and the composition of it. Race and country of origin and like factors would never be matters that were relevant to selection.

I haven't shared with you the story about how I managed to become the shadow minister for immigration. I hadn't been a shadow minister or I hadn't been a minister during the time of the Frazer Government. I know I was considered but I wasn't called. But I was chosen by Andrew Peacock to be a shadow minister I think I was the last in the 'cab rank'. I was appointed Shadow Minister for the Australian Capital Territory. Now that may have been relevant because I was born in Canberra, it was a time where you did have some decisions to make. There was no legislative body in Canberra at that time and for those of you who are devotees of the ABC like me, would know that the popular program for politicians, all politicians at that time, was the 'A.M' program at 8 O'clock in the morning. Well in Canberra, its not the case now but the quarter to eight news was 10 minutes national and 5 minutes local and I managed to get that 5 minutes or part of that 5 minute slot almost everyday. And everybody was listening; they thought I was a very active shadow minister. But we had an immigration debate even at that point in time engineered by a fellow called Michael Hodgman and we were reaffirm the immigration principles establish my Michael McKellern and Malcolm Frazer at meeting in Townsville in 1984, the first election after Frazer had lost, the election that Peacock in fact gained quite considerable ground but the meeting in Townsville to settle the policy had been a fairly, a fairly detailed meeting in which all the focus was on immigration policy.

Now, in order for this story to mean anything, I should tell you that when I was first appointed Shadow Minister for the A.C.T, a lady called Nia Stratcoulos, active in the Greek community in Canberra, came to me and said “you need to have a settlement policy, an ethnic affairs policy

for the ACT” and I said “thank you very much that is a good idea I’ll work on it” and she said “look you don’t have to bother very much about that, I’ve got one here” and she handed me this document which I then dutifully on and so there we were up in Townsville discussing immigration, we got to the end, we settled the immigration policy, and Michael Hodgman was breathing a sigh of relief to I said now we’ve got the immigration policy settled where’s the settlement policy? And he threw his hands up in horror and said “you can’t be expecting me to do this I have been so busy writing the immigration policy” and Peacock said to me look he’s obviously too busy to do this, do you think you could bring something to the next meeting. So I went back to my office I took out my settlement policy for the ACT, struck out ACT wherever it occurred and took it to the next meeting. We had the election and shortly after Peacock came to me and said “would you like to be the Shadow Minister for Immigration?” I don’t think people often understand how problematic some of these calls are and in that case it certainly enabled me over a period of time because I was Shadow Minister for Immigration for about I think 6 months or so after after Peacock had not been elected in 1984, when Howard became leader he did not want me in that role and was recalled when Peacock was recalled. I remained shadow minister when Hewson was there after Hewson lost in 1993 I was then Shadow Minister for Social Security. But that time as shadow minister for immigration, working on the relevant parliamentary committees, focusing on policy development, identifying areas which I thought reform was necessary, was extraordinarily important in preparing me for the role which I was to fulfill in 1996.

At that time I had spent a good deal of effort in identifying where if you were going to restore public confidence in immigration programs and the way in which they should be conducted, how you go about it, identifying areas in which there had been a development of fraud there are many stories you could tell but when I became minister some of the very early decisions we took were in relation to containing the growth in family reunion, and particularly in relation to marriage relationships which were the subject of little scrutiny but were often used as a basis for getting people with low levels of skill through the door, and those first measures we put in place involved giving people temporary visas, undertaking some interviews and also restricting serial sponsorships. It was interesting that there was one person, a fairly elderly person, who

had sponsored nine wives from the Philippines; he never seemed to be able to make the relationships work.

There situations where people would knowingly marry an Australian in expectation that they could walk out of the relationship having acquired permanent residency and then sponsor a partner themselves from abroad. When we put in place bona fides testing arrangements, the numbers of applications dropped by some 50 % and while there can be examples of people might point to of where people suffer a degree of hardship, while having to vouch for the nature of the relationship I think in the broader national interest those changes were necessary. It led to a fundamental repositioning of the migration program, I think restoring public confidence in the program that we saw skilled migration rise to 60% of the program numbers with the humanitarian program and family reunion constituting the balance. And I think one of the reasons we have a very much larger migration program today, is that the public saw in it and the way in which it was being conducted. A programme which was, vocacious, which was in the national interest, which was about nation building and people were comfortable in supporting. I regard it as being a great privilege to be in that role, I'm not sure all do I think there were in the Hawke and Keating Governments there were seven minister in that 13 years that they were in office and I think my two successors between them only has 2 years each. So seven and a half years as Minister for Migration is the longest period that any one person has served in Australia's history.

But to be the Attorney General of Australia for somebody who has legal training is of a of great significance. I stood in the shoes of people whom I have greatly admired. It might surprise you, three of my predecessors have been Attorney General of the Commonwealth, Sir Garfield Barwick, Sir Nigel Bowen, and in the seat of Berowra, Tom Hughes, and when I look at the shoes in which I have had to walk I regard it as being a great privilege. A modern attorney has a very different role to those of earlier years. Not because the role has changed but because circumstances have changed. Modern attorneys have always had to oversight security agencies; have always sat on the National Security Committee of Cabinet, been responsible for the issuing of warrants for surveillance for counter espionage and now counter terrorism purposes. In my view for most of my predecessors it was a fairly marginal part of their

responsibilities but in recent years it has loomed very large almost to the point at times where it occupies more than 50% of your waking hours.

And so in that sense to me there was a possibility that your role as Attorney General could be seen in a very narrow cast way. So I certainly set about to be a reformer in the area of public policy in the Attorney General's portfolio, in fact it is said that my successor has the luxury at the moment (won't always be the case), of being able to continue with the implementation of a number of measures which I had initiated.

Harmonization of the laws around Australia involving the Commonwealth and states (in my view looms large) and for me the most important and immediate measure (which is in the process of implementation at the moment) is the new regime of personal property security. If I spoke at length about the nature of reform the law agenda that I was pursuing I'm sure eyes would glaze over. But for me I saw it as being important to be remembered for a reform agenda (even if it only written in the legal pages of the Financial Review or the Australian on Fridays) then to be seen as totally absorbed in the national security questions as important as they are.

As you can probably judge I do have a great deal of passion about areas in which I had responsibility. I don't think it's possible to be in public life unless you really do believe that you are there to make a difference. I hope, that in relation to the way in which I have fulfilled my responsibilities (whether people agree or otherwise with me) there will be an understanding that there was that degree of focus and effort. I've been asked about what it's like now to be on the backbench, some of you will recall having asking me that tonight. And I recall that Gareth Evans was asked that question um when Labour lost office in 1996 and he said "its relevance deprecation". Um there's a degree of truth in that, when you are a minister while you may take the time (and I think you should) to well inform yourself to make any decision. To hear the different views into what you might do at the end of the day, most of the time the buck stops with you and you are capable of implementing decisions. I think that's why so many do, aspire to be a minister in a government rather than just too simply be a member of parliament in itself.

But for me it is a great honour to be a member of parliament. And the difference is the way in which you approach the task. It's very

interesting, I remember going to one of my early party meetings under Malcolm Frazer and there was one of my friends that came into ah into the parliament from Tasmania, the seat of Franklin, his name was Bruce Goodluck. I think he's best remembered for being in the chicken suit and that may indicate something of the level of his contributions. I hope Bruce doesn't have a relative here in the room tonight.

But I can remember him coming into the party room meeting and saying "I've got a very strong view on this issue AND NOBODY IS LISTENING TO ME! Why aren't you listening to me?" and I sat there and scratched my head and said "you know if your making a point by trying to bludgeon us rather than arguing your case, don't you understand why nobody is listening?"

I think in public life, in a party, in a parliament; if you put into the issues that you want to influence the research, if you form your views, considering the variety of points of view if you can and argue your case, your can influence the course of events wherever you sit. And for me the challenge is always to find the way of putting in place those programs, those ideas that you have, those initiatives that you think should be taken. So when I was asked tonight to speak of my own thoughts about what you do when your in parliament and how you might influence the course of events I thought I should share that last thought with you. It really is a question on how you prepare, how you think about the issues, the research that you do, how persuasive you are and if you take that lesson and you work in that way in my view you will always be a success in public life.

Thank you very much.