

Speech for the Harry Holland Sign Unveiling

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New Zealand High Commission, Canberra

2 February 2011

Let me begin by thanking the Chief Minister for his attendance here today

I'd like to acknowledge too Dr Abjorensen, the President of the Canberra Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and Mr Ellett for bringing the story of Ginninderra-born Harry Holland - to our attention and ensuring that we worked together to make this happen.

Thank you also to Dr Pearson, the Chair of the ACT Heritage Council and to Ms Roberts as well as Mr Wain of the National Trust for all of their work too in bringing us together today.

I should also acknowledge here the contribution made by my High Commissioner, Dr John Larkindale who retired last week and is well known to you. More than most on our side, he helped ensure that this unveiling could happen today and I know he was particularly disappointed that he could not be here with you today.

Let me acknowledge also as a visitor to this country, the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on here today, the Ngunnawal people.

Nau mai haere mai.

The outpouring of sympathy and the open handed generosity of New Zealanders and Australians following the recent flooding across Australia, the Christchurch earthquake and the Pike River Mining disaster are moving reminders of the closeness of our relationship.

In each case, our countries were the first to provide one another with messages of support and, most importantly, immediate practical and unstinting assistance. As all true friends do, we did not ask 'what can we do?' We simply rolled up our sleeves and got on with it. No fuss, no bother, no expense spared. That is what friends are for.

And as Queensland prepares for Cyclone Yasi, our thoughts are with all Queenslanders during this difficult time. In a practical sense we have already been in touch for some time with the authorities in Queensland to discuss the help it may need and we will be in touch with them directly after the cyclone hits to discuss what may be needed.

This is the nature of a friendship that has been forged, not only during military conflicts and not just by crippling natural disasters, but in economic, scientific, artistic and business endeavour, on sporting fields too and in the rich exchange between us of political ideas and activists – one of whom we honour today.

For while Harry Holland's roots are undoubtedly here in Ginninderra, his branches are in New Zealand.

Indeed, New Zealand and Australia's rich shared history is symbolised by people like Harry Holland and is underpinned by a remarkable correlation in the fundamentals that bind us - a bedrock of shared civil values and aspirations which define us as New Zealanders and Australians.

Unlike many countries a New Zealander or an Australian is not defined exclusively by culture, blood lines or birthplace. Today, as we all know, many countries are struggling to decide in which way an immigrant - like Harry Holland - can ever be a citizen.

That is a question that is simply incomprehensible to our two countries. For us, a national identity is constructed on the ethos of participation. That participation is neither ethnic, locational nor cultural. It is the set of shared civil values which bind us as New Zealand and Australian citizens.

These shared civil values include our concept of mateship; the 'can-do' practical attitude that defines us and our commitment to a concept that is uniquely trans-Tasman – the concept of a "fair go".

And it is these civil values which I think Harry Holland, a son of Ginninderra and a founding father of the New Zealand Labour Party embodies.

I am confident that he would have been proud of the way our two countries responded to help one another in the aftermath of the natural disasters that have occurred in the past year. He too is remembered for a similar open-handed generosity to those in need.

The Chief Minister has already spoken eloquently about Harry Holland's activism and his unique and inspirational life and I don't want to repeat what has already been said, but let me just note that when Harry Holland and his wife Annie McLachlan migrated to New Zealand, they would have found a country in the first throes of nationhood.

And it was during these exciting years in New Zealand that Harry Holland helped write the constitution of the NZ Labour Party and, in this way, he remains one of its most influential founding fathers.

He was also the first leader of the parliamentary New Zealand Labour Party and it was during the Great Depression that he began to think and re-think some of his approaches on a range of economic issues. There is evidence to suggest that he could have been one of the great economic architects of our nation had he not suddenly died at the funeral of one of the great Maori leaders of the time Te Rata Mahuta.

Despite his untimely death, this son of Ginninderra's influence on the New Zealand Labour movement was lasting. His impact on Michael Joseph Savage was profound. Savage was our first Labour Prime Minister who led our nation through the Great Depression. In the longer term, Holland influenced the views of Prime Minister Peter Fraser, who took over after Prime Minister Savage's death from cancer in 1940 and led us through the Second World War and beyond. And through to the present day, Holland's thinking is symbolised in the existing Constitution of the New Zealand Labour Party.

There is a memorial in Wellington to this son of Ginninderra. It stands in the Bolton Street Cemetery – probably a bit too close for Harry’s liking to the memorial of Richard Seddon, a conservative Prime Minister of New Zealand. But I think Harry Holland may have appreciated the point that he is honoured in the same location that Prime Minister “King Dick” Seddon was honoured.

I am delighted therefore that in addition to the memorial in Wellington, there is now one here in Australia’s capital city.

For me this simply underlines the seamless nature of our two countries’ shared histories.

Perhaps when Harry Holland first came to New Zealand, he might have looked up at the Southern Cross in our sky and reflected that this was the same constellation he could have seen from Ginninderra.

For, as the German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, once said, we all share the same sky, it is only our horizons that are different.

I’d like to think that this was what Harry thought to himself as he set about enlarging New Zealand’s horizons through his vigorous and substantive contribution to the New Zealand Labour movement.

Thank you for being here with us today to celebrate and honour the memory of a son of Ginninderra and the founding father of the New Zealand Labour Party.

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