



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Lyons, Dame Enid Muriel, AD, GBE

SPEECH

Tuesday, 21 August 2018

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Speaker Colbeck, Sen Richard	Question No.

Senator COLBECK (Tasmania) (18:14): I too would like to associate myself with remarks celebrating the 75th anniversary of the election of Dame Enid Lyons to the House of Representatives. There has been a lot spoken about the way that Dame Enid conducted herself, the separation that she suffered from her husband, Joe, and the difficulties that she faced as a woman at that particular point in time. I think the first speech that we heard here this evening indicates how far we've come from the time when Dame Enid made such a spectacular entry into the Australian parliament.

As Senator Abetz has just said, she had quite a commanding presence. I didn't meet her at Liberal Party functions, as Senator Abetz did. I wasn't a member of the organisation by the time we'd lost—

Senator Cameron: Were you in the Labor Party?

Senator COLBECK: No, Senator Cameron. There was never any fear of that, I can promise you! But I did happen to be at the Devonport Town Hall when Dame Enid made a speech at what turned out to be her last public appearance, and the town hall on that night was so quiet. To quote an old, hackneyed line: you literally could have heard a pin drop. The entire audience hung on her every word.

While we talk about the 75th anniversary of her election, it's not as if she was an overnight success. The strength of the relationship between her and Joe was such that she was actually one of the best known prime ministerial wives, even in those days. She wrote articles for newspapers. She made radio broadcasts and open-air speeches. So she was clearly a practitioner, and Joe quite obviously was very comfortable to share the limelight and to work closely with her, as Senator Abetz has said.

She clearly had a strong presence in the community, and the important thing, I think, is that the community continues to recognise the value of the contribution that she made. The Rotary Club, of which I'm a member, as a bicentenary project constructed a tribute to both Joe and Dame Enid Lyons in Roundhouse Park in Devonport, where bronze portraits of Joe and Dame Enid were erected and continue to stand today. Both of them rest in the Mersey Vale cemetery just outside of Devonport, and their residence is one of the very few prime ministerial residences in Australia that remain open to the Australian public. In fact, it's very much as it was when Dame Enid passed away.

I've had occasion to visit there quite often. In fact, recently there was a lecture by Tim and Merridie Costello about the life and times of both Joe and Dame Enid. So it continues to be a centrepiece not just to celebrate Joe and Dame Enid, who played significant political roles in Australia and Tasmania, but as a reminder of the importance of the fact that both of them communicated to the rest of the country from that residence, which had one of the first telephone lines to a house in Tasmania when the phone was put on. So I think it's appropriate that tonight there's a dinner being held to celebrate the 75th anniversary, and I certainly believe that it's appropriate that this chamber recognises that significant event in the progress of our democracy and the fact that Dame Enid not only made such a significant contribution to the parliament but then continued to make a significant contribution to her community throughout the rest of her life. She was very active in the community and was held in very, very high regard by her community, and she continues to be held in that regard locally in my home town of Devonport, where she and Joe lived at their residence, Home Hill.

Question agreed to.