



Speech by

**BILL FELDMAN**

**MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE**

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Hansard 10 November 1998

**MR C. RAPPOLT**

**Mr FELDMAN** (Caboolture—ONP) (Leader of the One Nation Party) (11.50 a.m.): Much has been written about the reasons for the departure from State Parliament of Charles Rappolt. Obviously there are many pressures in politics and even Charles himself admits that, in retrospect, he probably lacks the thick hide necessary to cope with the rigours involved. However, there is no doubt that media pressure was the final straw.

The viciousness of the ongoing attacks on One Nation has its roots in media self-interest. One Nation opposes the foreign domination of the Australian media and the policies that allow multinational companies to extract enormous profits from Australia while paying little or no tax. Therefore, certain sections of the media and other political parties are diametrically opposed to One Nation's policies and philosophies. Some sections of the multinational media have used their editorial columns, for example, to threaten, cajole and plead with their readers not to vote for One Nation. Such blatant bias, along with flagrant disregard of their obligations to provide balanced reporting, has become commonplace.

This was never more clearly obvious than during the media campaign against Charles Rappolt and his family, when the Courier-Mail ignored a Supreme Court injunction and published details of a domestic violence order that had almost immediately been withdrawn. There is no doubt as to the motive of the journalist involved in the Rappolt assassination. It was certainly not compassion for Charles' partner, who had quickly withdrawn the order and was anxious to put the matter behind her so that they could get on with their lives. If compassion had been his motive, the journalist would have discharged his obligation to the public to report the matter and would have left the couple in peace. However, with delusions of adequacy and a pathetic penchant for sensation seeking, he pursued the matter with an obsessive fervour that resulted in much anguish not only for Charles but also for Sandra and the family as well.

Such was the ferocity of this campaign that, faced with the prospect of losing custody of her own children, Sandra was forced to withdraw from jointly shared accommodation that was financially beneficial to her and her family. That left Charles with the prospect of his 10-year-old son going to live with the lad's grandparents. The total destruction of his family situation struck home to Charles as his son sobbed in his arms and asked, "Why can't things be like they used to be?" Charles is a quiet and sensitive man who places a very high value on his family life. At that point he realised that politics was perhaps too high a price to pay. Charles took the proper and moral option and chose his family over politics.

Charles has apologised to his electors in Mulgrave for allowing this media campaign to deprive them of their chosen representative. However, his motivation has been honourable throughout. It is an indisputable fact that he did not enter politics for fame or fortune; it was a sincere desire to bring progress to his electorate and accountability back to Government, a concern about declining living standards generally and a fervent wish to support the mining industry with respect to native title that encouraged him to hold up his hand proudly for nomination. Charles' desire to right some of the wrongs that are having such a destructive impact on our society was the driving force that led this very private man into the very public arena of politics.

The media pressure and the stress it has applied, not so much on Charles but more particularly on his family, has forced him out. With the support of over one million Australians, One Nation is tough enough to withstand such an incredible and blatant media bias. Charles Rappolt was tough enough to

withstand personal attacks, but when such attacks destroyed his family and domestic situation, his priorities and sense of values decreed that he should move to protect those who are so close to him.

I remind the House that freedom of speech is one of the most basic and valuable tenets of society and it must be preserved at all costs. However, with this right comes an equally important responsibility, which is to respect that right and, particularly in the case of the media, to ensure that reporting is factual and balanced. The media has enormous power; no-one can dispute that. One can only hope that the media decision makers have the moral fibre not to use that power in a manipulative manner. As journalists decide on ethical conduct, they should remember the old adage: the ethics they choose to live by in this world are not necessarily those that they themselves will be judged by in the next. If journalists stuck to a debate on the policy rather than the person, there would be little complaint.

In closing, before there is any further speculation, I inform the House that the absence of the honourable member for Barambah is due to a traffic incident that occurred outside Kilcoy some weeks ago. The member will again be present in this House when she recovers from her injuries.

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