



Speech by

JEFF KNUTH

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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NATIVE TITLE (QUEENSLAND) STATE PROVISIONS AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2)

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—ONP) (11.07 p.m.): I will address some quotes from the ALP from 1973 to 1975. An article from the West Australian of 23 October 1973 states—

"Federal Government social service benefits were dislocating Aboriginal family and tribal life in some areas, the Minister for Social Security, Mr Hayden, said today.

The payments had caused a severe cultural jolt to Aborigines. He said, 'It has reached the point where I am greatly concerned.'

Mr Hayden was replying to Mr Bennett (Lab., W.A.) who said in the House of Representatives that press reports had alleged that Aborigines in W.A. were spending their money on taxis, liquor and in other ways rather than on family welfare.

Earlier this year, the Federal Government decided to pay all normal social security benefits to Aborigines. These include child endowment, widows' pensions and unemployment benefits.

Mr Hayden said it was clear that there would be problems if the Aborigines were directed to spend their social security benefits in the same way as other people."

Mr REEVES: I rise to a point of order. I am questioning the relevance of this to the Bill before the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mickel): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr KNUTH: The man must have been a prophet. However, problems were developing in Aboriginal communities, especially in those in remote areas of Western Australia. He said—

"I am sure this is not the only part of Australia in which Aborigines are living under similar conditions."

Mr Hayden said that he had been sceptical about such reports earlier this year, but he now conceded that a problem existed. It was worrying many people, including anthropologists and sociologists. He said—

"The tendency of the people receiving the money is to move away from family and tribal links for a number of reasons. I will not enumerate the reasons or the symptoms of what happens, because there is a tendency for these to be exaggerated and dramatised for public effect."

An article in the West Australian newspaper from 27 February 1974 stated—

"Canberra: the Federal Government had bungled Aboriginal policy, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Cavanagh, said yesterday. Senator Cavanagh said the policy had altered the 'whole character of the Australian individual' and created areas of hatred.

...

'Labor's implementation of its policy in Aboriginal Affairs has been one of disaster,' he told the National Press Club."

Finally, I agree with a Labor Minister—most Labor policies are a disaster. The article continued—

" 'We still don't know what is best for Aborigines."

Later, the Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, disagreed with Senator Cavanagh's claim.

The article continued—

"Senator Cavanagh said the disaster had culminated in yesterday's suspension of the Aboriginal public servant Charles Perkins on a charge of improper conduct."

That is not hard for a racist activist such as Charlie Perkins. The article went on—

"He said that when Labor came to power in December, 1972, it had an 'enthusiastic Minister'—Mr Bryant—and an enthusiastic department.

They had tried to implement Labor's policy of helping Aborigines within the first month of Government.

'This has resulted in many actions that would not have been taken had we sat down and reasoned it out more thoroughly,' he said."

That is a lesson to be learned by the Beattie Government. The article continues—

"It resulted in the allocation of money more quickly than we could afford to go through the normal channels of the public service and those channels required by the regulations for the expenditure. It was all done in a spirit of enthusiasm, a spirit of intention, to try to assist those who were thought to have been so long oppressed by the white community."

It sounds so familiar. The article continues—

"Senator Cavanagh said that the Government had doubled expenditure on Aboriginal Affairs to \$117 million."

Native title will cost billions in the long term. The article goes on—

"It is only now that we are finding that cash is not the solution to the preservation of the life of Aborigines and the uplifting of the Aboriginal people,' he said."

Labor does not learn from its mistakes. The article continues—

"He said the policy had a big effect on public servants in the Aboriginal Affairs Department—'possibly affecting them physically and mentally.'

...

Labor's implementation of its policy had developed a section in the community who could see a career in championing the cause of the oppressed.

'To raise themselves up in prestige they must have an oppressed section and must have oppressors,' he said.

'If the oppressors cannot be easily found and identified, they are manufactured."

Here we have a Labor Senator admitting that they have manufactured racial oppression. The article continues—

"Senator Cavanagh said that the Government was determined to develop consciousness and understanding of Aboriginal culture.

'It is my determination and it is the determination of most of the department,' he said.

'We must be ruthless and ride roughshod over those who would seek to stop us from this ambition that we hope to achieve in Aboriginal Affairs.'

Senator Cavanagh said the Government must get Aborigines involved in their own management and in their own finances."

Another disaster! The article goes on—

"He said that the Government did not want to divide Aborigines into urban and non-urban Aborigines.

'But I think that the solution must be different in different areas,' he said.

'I don't think the problems are the same when they are city and when they are tribal Aborigines.'

Senator Cavanagh said that many tribes were mixed in urban black society. They were not recognised as a single tribe.

Careerist Aborigines among urban black were causing difficulties in the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee."

An article in the West Australian of 24 July 1975 stated—

"There is unlikely to be an attempt to remove or restrict Aboriginal drinking rights in W.A.

The Minister for Police, Mr O'Connor, and the Minister for Community Welfare, Mr Baxter, who had both opposed the granting of rights, said yesterday that it would be difficult or impossible to remove the rights now. But Mr O'Connor believes that their removal would be desirable.

Aborigines in the south-west were given drinking rights by the Brand Liberal Government in 1964. They were extended by the same Government to Aborigines in the north-west in 1966. In 1971, the Tonkin Labor Government extended the rights to Aborigines in the eastern goldfields and Kimberleys.

Mr O'Connor, who recently toured the north-west, said yesterday that 90 per cent of the trouble the police had to deal with in the north was directly linked to Aboriginal drinking. He said yesterday: 'It was all very well to grant the rights, but it has damaged Aboriginal communities.' "

I have said the same, and been called a redneck racist who would like to deprive Aborigines of their liberties. The article continues—

"I spoke to Aboriginal elders and they agreed with me. The damage has been done."

He hoped that the recently appointed police aides in the north would help to overcome the problem."

To this day it has not. The article continues—

"Mr Baxter said the stage had been reached where Aboriginal drinking rights could not be taken away.

The former Minister for Community Welfare, Mr W. F. Willesee, said yesterday he had thousands of regrets since he extended drinking rights to all Aborigines in W.A. from July 1, 1971.

But he would do the same thing today if faced with the decision. It was inevitable after the 1967 referendum granted equality for Aborigines."

Here we are more than 25 years later and we still have all the problems of alcoholism in the Aboriginal community. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs commented on this in the House today. A week ago, Murrandoo Yanner admitted that his people are committing offences against their women and families that are so brutal that it is indescribable.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mickel): Order! I ask the member for Burdekin to address the native title legislation before the House.

Mr KNUTH: I am getting to that. Murrandoo Yanner agreed that alcohol was the problem. He stated that these offenders, once put to work on a property free of alcohol, undergo such a change that we would not believe it is the same person. It is incredible that when I commented on the same system it was twisted around by journalists and I was called a racist.

We are now about to make a decision in relation to native title. Will we be able to look back in 25 years and be proud of ourselves and say to each other that we all made the right decision? Have we made the indigenous people of Australia happy? Are they now as contented as they were before the white man came to this country? I can assure you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that they will not be because, as has happened in the past, indigenous people have already started tribal fighting over land claims. They are fighting, just as our early explorers found them fighting 100 years earlier. Anyone who has read Cape York—The Wild Frontier will know that the pioneer Frank Jardine had an entire Aboriginal tribe camped at the northern port town of Somerset. This tribe camped next to the town because a stronger tribe laid claim to their hunting grounds and threatened them with extinction. Eventually, when Somerset ceased to exist, the Aborigines were massacred to the last man, woman and child by the stronger Aboriginal tribe. This is all historically documented.

If this native title legislation is passed, I will stand in this House 12 months from now and I will prove to the House that native title has not worked and never will. Do we want to make the same mistakes that the Federal Labor Party admitted it made over 25 years ago because something that may seem to be the right thing to do can cause a catastrophe to the very people it was intended to help?
