



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

Hansard 26 May 1999

STOLEN GENERATION

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—ONP) (2.58 p.m.): In furthering the debate today, I concur with the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! Is the honourable member seconding the motion?

Mr FELDMAN: No, I am not.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Are there any seconders for the amendment of the member for Gladstone? The amendment fails for the lack of a seconder.

Mr FELDMAN: As I said, I concur with the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition with respect to the initial feelings of intimidation within the Parliament today. I too am not a lesser person because I hold an alternate view or respond on behalf of other Queenslanders who hold an alternate view with respect to this debate. We learn from history and move on. We should be about making this country a better place in 1999 and beyond the millennium.

I repeat: we learn from the past and we move on. We do not dredge up the past and apportion blame. We do not point the finger of guilt at those people who did not even make those decisions or interpret the laws that affected that part of history. If we do that, we alienate and divide. This motion by the Premier is not the glue to bond and unite, as was seen on every radio and television station yesterday; it is the very acid which will destroy the cohesion that was being achieved by the reconciliation process. No, the Premier will not be speaking for me as a Queenslanders if he decides to say sorry, nor will he be speaking for the vast majority of those who are my constituents.

However, yes, there are a few things that I am sorry about. I am sorry that an inordinately high per capita percentage of our taxes are poured into an Aboriginal industry while delivering so little to those very same people who are in genuine need. I am sorry that the funding is being absorbed by a greedy and unscrupulous element of non-accountable bureaucracy while poverty and disease continue to pervade the indigenous people. Yes, I am sorry that the politically correct and the activists, mostly non-Aboriginal, non-indigenous and many from foreign countries, continue to fuel the fires of hatred and are causing divisiveness that contributes further to the plight of our indigenous people, not to their betterment.

Yes, I am sorry that the Aboriginal people are being judged now on a lesser standard than white Australia. A spate of recent articles by Tony Koch in the Courier-Mail highlighted the plight of children in Aboriginal settlements who were being abused, bashed and raped. He told of children walking around with tin cans strapped to their face sniffing petrol. Mr Noel Pearson confirmed the fact that indigenous people were suffering at the hands of the welfare mentality of Australian Governments which threatens to destroy his very people. The same sentiments were expressed by Pauline Hanson some two years earlier and were met—I repeat: were met—with ridicule and condemnation.

In this country it appears that, as far as the media is concerned, it is not what is said that counts but who says it. That is a sad state for this country to be in. Yes, I am sorry that these children being abused right now through substance abuse, alcoholism and domestic violence are not being taken from their families and placed in care which could assist them. The Minister for Families highlighted statistics and commented on the shameful overrepresentation of indigenous children in our State-run institutions. I gathered from her speech that the way to deal with this overrepresentation is not to do

anything about the plight of these children and the underlying causes of their overrepresentation. Are we entering a phase of acceptance? Are we entering a phase of tolerance, of seeing children with tin cans of petrol strapped to their faces, and not lifting a finger to help or to save them because of mere political correctness? I hope this is not the politically correct environment this Parliament wishes to live in.

Are we merely to sit here and abrogate the responsibilities we have to these children? Are they so different? Do they not deserve the same standard of care as any other child? We should compare the cases outlined by Mr Koch in the Courier-Mail to the case of Ms Tahnee Johnstone, who had her daughter taken from her by Family Services, not because she was refusing appropriate medical care for her child but because she chose one of several treatment options recommended by medical specialists. Why was this family torn asunder because a mother sought a second opinion? The apparently offended doctor made a report to the Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect team which culminated in a mother and her 13-year-old daughter being separated.

Meanwhile, medical personnel appear to be prepared to ignore the bruises and other signs of abuse being presented in Aboriginal communities. However, if we are a thinking parent of a child with a chronic illness or a disability and live in a place to which the overzealous engineers of the Department of Families can commute during working hours, the case of Tahnee Johnstone should be sending a shiver up and down our spine right now.

One would wonder whether our pious and pompous Premier's self-recrimination will extend to an apology to the children brought to Australia from the United Kingdom, the people brought to Australia from Kosovo and the hundreds of white Australian children who are being taken from their families every day, even as I speak. It is highly probable that at this very moment the Department of Families is removing children from parents because, just as was the case when Aboriginal children were taken from their families, the department thinks that it is acting in the best interests of those children. It seems to be a point that we missed that these children were taken at a time when that department and those institutions thought they were doing the right thing. I believe we have to walk a mile in someone's shoes before we begin to point the finger of derision.

Will the Premier apologise to everyone who has been relocated and will continue to be relocated in years to come, or do they have to be indigenous or of some other nationality to qualify? While he is off on his illogical tangent of self-flagellation, will this apology for a Premier apologise to the thousands of Aboriginal children who were not taken away from their families and who were thereby condemned to a premature death from malnutrition, neglect or abuse? Until the Premier can start to do something positive and bring about effective delivery of welfare to those in genuine need regardless of colour, race or creed—until he can begin to treat all Queenslanders equally—he can leave me out of his shallow political stunt.

I will not be part of an apology for actions which were instigated in good faith and with the best interests of the children at heart. This was done at a time and a place far removed from the politically correct, self-centred, morally bankrupt and ideologically contaminated 1990s. How can anybody judge the actions of the people acting under the law of the time and, rightly or wrongly, administering that law according to the ideological principles of the day?

The Premier has not walked a mile in the shoes of the legislators of that time. How dare he presume to make judgments on their actions! I believe that the Premier's overreaction is a political stunt aimed at trying to resurrect the old racist tag in respect of anyone who opposes his political ideology. As I said, as was seen and heard on radio yesterday, all he has succeeded in doing is causing greater division within the very Queensland community he is attempting to unite. His divisive actions are merely a smokescreen to hide this Government's inability to protect those in genuine need and his inability to honour his election promise of jobs, jobs, jobs. One Nation will not be drawn into such a shallow political stunt.
