



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

Hansard 9 June 1999

WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—ONP) (9.59 p.m.), in reply: Before I begin, I acknowledge the contribution of all members who participated in this debate and the passion with which they spoke. I will comment initially on a statement made at the last sitting in this debate by the Attorney-General, who said that the spectre of Martin Bryant haunts this Parliament. The only trace of Martin Bryant in our society today should be his spectre. If the citizens of Tasmania had the ability to carry a firearm in self-defence, how many lives would have been saved had a solid, community-minded citizen put him away? If the Attorney-General and his Government had the guts to put the issue of capital punishment to a referendum, evil murdering offenders such as Martin Bryant would only be ghosts and spectres in our society. The good thing about ghosts is that they do not hurt anybody.

When the One Nation drafted organ donor Bill is finally passed, perhaps in future a few dying One Nation members will be able to donate their spines to members of the Labor Party and the coalition. It is not a Viagra pill that they need, but a backbone. Instead of hanging vicious criminals, the Government puts them away in comfortable accommodation, feeds them three meals a day and gives them free medical care, education and entertainment. Meanwhile, the families of victims suffer in silence, anguish and often poverty, unable to understand why the killers are protected by the State. That is what is wrong with Queensland. It has nothing to do with firearms.

Three weeks ago, two separate brutal attacks occurred in Queensland in which two males were abducted, raped, set on fire and left for dead. That is what is wrong with Queensland, and it has nothing to do with firearms. Last month a 23 year old man was convicted of murder in the Western Australian Supreme Court. The man killed his 67 year old grandmother and her pet dog not with a gun but with a hammer, a lawn edger and a knife. Then he attempted to decapitate and disembowel the corpse. He removed part of his grandmother's intestine and hung it over a fan. He told the police that he was inspired by the movie *Silence of the Lambs* and that he had prepared a list of people to kill. That is what is wrong with society, and it has nothing to do with firearms.

A number of years ago a little girl named Sian Kingi was attacked. As I have elaborated on my involvement in the investigation previously, I will not comment further except to warn the House that noted criminologist and social psychologist Paul Wilson has said—

"If people think that violent sexual offenders can be rehabilitated they are living in cloud cuckoo-land."

That is what is wrong with our State. It has nothing to do with firearms.

On 5 May 1999, we read in the *Courier-Mail* that young Australians are learning their problem solving and aggression from violent video games and absorbing the same misguided ideals that led to the recent US school massacres. That is what is wrong with our kids. Firearms are not the problem. On the subject of educating our children, let me read a poem that Year 8 children from the Beenleigh State High School were given to study and prepare an assignment on about one month before the Littleton schoolyard massacre in Colorado. The poem, by Roger McGough, is titled "The Lesson". It reads—

"Chaos ruled OK in the classroom
as bravely the teacher walked in
the havocwreckers ignored him
his voice was lost in the din
'The theme for today is violence
and homework will be set
I'm going to teach you a lesson
one that you'll never forget'
He picked on a boy who was shouting
and throttled him then and there
then garrotted the girl behind him
(the one with grotty hair)
Then sword in hand he hacked his way
between the chattering rows
'First come, first severed' he declared
'fingers, feet, or toes'
He threw the sword at a latecomer
it struck with deadly aim
then pulling out a shotgun
he continued with his game
The first blast cleared the backrow
(where those who skive hang out)
they collapsed like rubber dinghies
when the plug's pulled out
'Please may I leave the room, sir?'
a trembling vandal enquired
'Of course you may' said teacher
put the gun to his temple and fired
The Head popped a head round the doorway
to see why a din was being made
nodded understandingly
then tossed in a grenade
And when the ammo was well spent
with blood on every chair
Silence shuffled forward
with its hands up in the air
The teacher surveyed the carnage
the dying and the dead
He waggled a finger severely
'Now let that be a lesson' he said"

The poem was enclosed with a letter sent to me by a woman who was appalled that this poem would be given to children in that school as the basis for a lesson. She writes—

"I am a very concerned mother of a year 8 student, who was given the enclosed poem by her English teacher.

I personally do not see that it is an appropriate poem to be used in the school curriculum. I rang the Beenleigh State High School to make a formal complaint at my disgust at the poem.

I spoke to one of the Deputy Principals who knew nothing of the poem as it was not in his department.

He said that he would speak to the English teacher concerned and that someone would get back to me.

When the Head of the English Department rang me back it was to tell me that she knew nothing of the poem. When she had spoken to the teacher concerned, she was told that it was to show students that poetry could be funny and that it did not have to be dull and boring."

The writer of this letter expressed her view that there was nothing funny about the violence portrayed in this poem. I thoroughly agree. She was told that there was nothing that could be done about it now as the poem had been handed out, and that they will try to choose more appropriate poems in the future. The writer stated—

"I feel that should never have been handed out at school in the first place. It was only a few days later that the massacre happened in the school in the USA."

This is what is wrong with children today. I table the poem and the letter for the information of the House.

A study by the US Office of National Drug Control Policy found that drugs, alcohol and tobacco are used in 98% of all movies. According to retired Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman, a US military professor and behavioural expert on killing, the violent video games played by Australian teenagers are used by the US military to desensitise its soldiers and turn them into killing machines. That is what is wrong with our society today. It has nothing to do with firearms.

This week in Wollongong a 32 year old man killed a two year old child with what? A gun? No, with a claw hammer! In Sydney two men bashed another man to death while a crowd of onlookers cheered and clapped. That is what is wrong with our society today. It has nothing to do with firearms. The people responsible for these abominable acts should not be living in our society any more. For the common good, they should be put to death. There is no justification, either moral or economic, to keep these types of monsters alive. The families of the victims suffer in anguish, unable to understand why their taxes feed, clothe, house and educate the monsters who killed their loved ones.

Is the Government aware of the call from individuals and community groups alike to allow suitably qualified people to acquire a firearm for self-defence? I refer to a letter from the President of the Victims of Crime Association Queensland dated 13 June 1996 to then Police Minister Russell Cooper. It stated—

"Dear Minister

Thank you for the opportunity for our organisation to put forward a submission on the issue of gun control.

Over the past few weeks I have received input on this issue from a number of branches of the association."

The letter continues—

"I feel that the branches and members are conveying to me through their personal input, primarily, that they do not share the opinions of the anti-gun lobby, and in fact believe that all those who want to have a weapon should be able, if they pass the necessary criteria, to do so, etc."

In addition, Mr Ian Davies goes on and says plainly what should be concerning this Government. He emphasises mental health; alcohol and drug abuse; visual violence in movies, videos, computer games, etc.; media violence; the insensitive pursuit of victims of violence and sensational reporting; lack of discipline in schools and homes; lack of responsibility by parents; and lack of commitment by the criminal justice system. I can only echo the noble concerns of this man who cares for the suffering of victims—a very righteous cause. But instead of tackling the cause of the increasingly dysfunctional society, you have taken the path of least resistance and created the gun grab.

Recently we saw on A Current Affair that a Tasmanian RSL also wants people to be able to defend themselves with firearms. The comments of these two community groups are in accord with our policy and allow licensed people to obtain a firearm for self-defence while restricting possession of category D weapons to members of military rifle clubs established under the auspices of the military Act of 1913. Does the Attorney-General regard these people as rednecks?

Two phenomena have become apparent during this debate to introduce better firearm laws into Queensland. The first phenomena is the absence of the National Party in this debate. It is missing in action, as the cartoon illustrated this morning—no target—because its members have been ordered to keep their mouths shut and to do as they have been told. They say they will fix the gun laws when they are in Government. Talk is cheap and no-one believes them. Incidentally, just for the information of the House, I point out that they have removed their firearm policy from the National Party Internet site.

The second revelation emerging from this debate is that, with the exception of the member for Gladstone and a couple of other members on this side of the House, no-one in this House appears to be able to read, because they have demonstrated the most appalling ignorance in relation to this Bill. No wonder the public complains that politicians do not understand them. Let me say it again for the literarily challenged—and I would have said "brain dead", but some have clearly shown in this debate that they did not have one to begin with, as the member for Logan clearly demonstrated.

The Weapons Amendment Bill is a direct translation of our State firearm policy, which was released before the State election. We only want good people to own firearms, and that is why we support compulsory licensing and compulsory practical and theoretical training. That is why we also adopted the concept of the prohibited persons register from the Queensland Liberal Party. We do want people to have a freedom of choice. If they are of good character and if they qualify for a licence, then they should be entitled to obtain a firearm for self-defence if they wish to do so. We do not want

children having unsupervised access to firearms, and our policy reflects this. We do not want licensed firearm owners to individually register their category A, B or C firearms because that will not reduce crime, is a waste of police manpower and because we believe that the individual registration of firearms is only the prelude to eventual confiscation of all privately owned firearms in Australia.

We do believe that our defence forces are chronically inadequate to perform the task of protecting us, and we support the use of military rifles by properly constituted military rifle clubs, as originally envisaged under the defence Act of 1913. After both great wars, our Government gave away guns and ammunition to our people so that they could learn to handle a firearm. Why? So that we would be in a state of preparedness should the unspeakable occur again! Are any of us ready today should the unspeakable happen? No-one is prepared to face this truth.

We believe that it is not the fault of firearm owners that we live in an increasingly unemployed, violent and immoral society within which no Australian Government—and I repeat: no Australian Government—has had the guts or ability to tackle the problems, and we believe that every human being has a God given right to effectively defend themselves and their family and that no State can take away that right. This is one of the inalienable rights that our ancestors fought and died for and is a right that should never be taken away. This State is dismantling that legacy.

The contribution made by the member for Mount Ommaney was so inane that none of it warrants a response, except in relation to the crime figures that she quoted from the Minister's graph. We have discovered that the graph was produced by the police at the Minister's request. As we cannot examine the data it was compiled from, we have no further comment except to say that it is a political graph quickly cobbled together. If the Minister was fair dinkum, he would table the ancillary data as well.

The latest Queensland police statistical review summarises the situation in easy to understand language. On page 11 it says—

"The increasing trend in armed robbery evident in 1996/1997 (when reported offences rose by twenty percent) has continued this year, with offences rising by sixteen percent from 1070 to 1246 offences."

It also says that robbery offences tend to occur more frequently in the south-east corner of the State, with the highest rate occurring in the Metropolitan North Region, with 93 offences per 100,000 population, where one would expect the level of legal firearm ownership to be low. In other words, the incidence of armed robbery appears to be inversely proportional to firearm ownership. This laughs in the face of the report of the friends of the criminals: the Coalition for Gun Control.

We also see from the CJC publication A Snapshot of Crime in Queensland from February 1999 that armed robbery has risen from 17 per 100,000 population in 1989-90 to 36 per 100,000 in 1997-98. More interestingly, we can see from the same publication that the Queensland armed robbery rate of 36 per 100,000 population is much lower than the national average of 48 per 100,000, yet Queensland has the greatest density of firearm ownership in Australia. What does that indicate? It indicates that firearms in good hands are unrelated to the increase in armed robbery. In fact, the reverse may be true.

More startling evidence that the gun grab has failed to curb armed crime may be found in the Australian Bureau of Statistics publication 4510, Recorded Crime, Australia, 1997. We see the number of victims of armed robbery has increased from 6,256 in 1996 to 9,015 in 1997, or a 44% increase, in spite of the gun grab. We also learn that the Northern Territory, which always has had draconian gun laws, has the highest rates in Australia per 100,000 population for murder, assault and sexual assault. How can honourable members argue with data like that?

Something is badly wrong in Australia, but I can tell honourable members now that decent Australians owning firearms have not caused it. Criminals with criminal intent, who will always have access to any firearm they like, are the ones who have caused it. They are the ones targeted by our legislation.

The bleeding hearts tell us that we cannot stop drugs from coming into this country. The same is true for firearms. It is as easy as the ordering of engine parts over the Internet, as the Sunday Mail clearly indicated. Regarding suicide, the publication Firearm-related violence: The impact of a Nationwide Agreement on Firearms, published by the Australian Institute of Criminology, shows that the total number of suicides is increasing from 2,393 in 1996 to 2,723 in 1997 and that in 1997 just 12% of suicides were firearm related. This tells us that the gun grab has had no effect on suicide numbers and that more people in Australia are killing themselves. That is something that this Government should be addressing—why they are doing it.

Let us look at the suicide rate of Japan, where the legal ownership of firearms is prohibited. According to our information from the Parliamentary Library, in 1967 Australia had a suicide rate of 12.7 per 100,000 people and Japan's rate was 14.1 per 100,000. In 1994 Australia had a suicide rate of 12.9 per 100,000. Japan's rate had jumped to 17 per 100,000, and yet there is no civilian ownership of firearms in Japan.

Suicide statistics from other countries also tell the same sorry story of how this world is progressing in relation to suicide. If people want to suicide, they will find a way. This fact must be very disappointing to the Minister for Families, who obviously does not like firearms and does not want anyone else to have one either and who will say or do anything to get her way.

What about the well-documented fact that some 18,000 people per year die due to the effects of our hospital system? If the real issue was saving lives, then surely spending the \$500m on our hospitals rather than on confiscating guns from the good people would have saved more lives. Something is causing people to suicide, but it is not firearms. Something has caused an increase in armed crime in Australia, but it is not firearms.

I emphasise to this House that we have fully referenced all our sources so that anyone may verify our figures. That is something we cannot do in the case of the nebulous contributions by the members for Archerfield, Waterford and South Brisbane. The member for Archerfield perhaps let the cat out of the bag when she said that semiautomatic hand guns would be confiscated next. I must tell the member: every firearm owner—every honest, law-abiding concealable firearm owner—heard her.

One of the reasons we are stoically fighting here tonight is that we believe that the national registration of all firearms is but a prelude to total confiscation. We fear that this is only the thin end of the wedge and that ultimately the plan is to completely disarm the Australian civilian population. I will read to the House a quote from a very famous person. Then I will ask the House to identify the author. It was said—

"This year will go down in history. For the first time, a civilised nation has full gun registration. Our streets will be safer, our police more efficient, and the world will follow our lead."

Who said that? It certainly was not John Howard and, no, it was not the Police Minister either. Nor was it the member for South Brisbane, the member for Archerfield or the member for Greenslopes. It was actually Adolf Hitler. We all know that, rather than a safe society emerging, the extreme opposite occurred.

Whilst I acknowledge that the aforementioned persons all have a strange resemblance to Hitler in stature and policy, I do not agree that we should follow them in the goosestep of the gun grab. I recommend that anybody who wishes to learn how many people died as a result of Hitler's gun grab contact an organisation called Jews for the Preservation of Firearm Ownership Inc. These Jewish people truly understand and know the ultimate price paid for compulsory firearm registration. That was disarmament and then death.

The member for Archerfield also said that the perpetrator of the Dunblane massacre would qualify for a hand gun licence in Queensland. I can confidently say that the perpetrator would definitely not get a licence under our legislation. I refer to the public inquiry into the shooting at Dunblane primary school on 13 March 1996. From that inquiry report, produced by the Central Scotland Police, we note that the perpetrator was in fact on the list of unsuitable persons kept by the scout association. The report suggests that the man was mentally unstable and possibly a pederast. Not that the second offence bothers those opposite, but a mentally unstable person would be reportable under our legislation.

Mr FOLEY: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The remark the honourable member made is offensive personally, I believe, to every member on this side of the House and I ask that he withdraw it.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Will you withdraw that comment?

Mr FELDMAN: I refer to your rules, Mr Speaker, in relation to all people. The remark has to be personal.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! What did you say?

Mr FELDMAN: I was informed that the insult had to be personal.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I think the whole of the Government side could take points of order.

Mr FELDMAN: One Nation has been called many things and there should be no point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I will ask the Clerk for his advice on this matter. The remark is certainly unparliamentary and I ask you to withdraw it.

Mr FELDMAN: I withdraw it on those grounds, Mr Speaker. I will talk about self-defence and the 1688 Bill of Rights, which is part of Queensland law as confirmed by the Imperial Acts Applications Act 1985. This Bill clearly implies that a person has the right to acquire a weapon to defend himself or herself. The fact that the Bill refers to religious groups is irrelevant as we have freedom of religion under section 116 of the Commonwealth Constitution. The Leader of the Liberal Party was only half smart when he made reference to this in his speech, but that was possibly all he could do. The right to self-defence is a God-given, inalienable right which this Government is obfuscating by stopping qualified, good, law-abiding Queenslanders from obtaining a firearm to defend themselves or their loved ones.

Our Commonwealth Constitution mainly limits the powers of Government rather than bestows rights on individuals. This means that if something is not prohibited under our Constitution, our foundation legal document, then it is legal. For example, free speech is not mentioned in the Constitution but the High Court has decided that we do have it. Likewise, the issue of self-defence is not mentioned in the Constitution. Therefore, I expect that if the High Court was forced to decide it would rule that we all have an inherent right to self-defence, and effective self-defence at that. Unless one is a martial arts expert, one is effectively defenceless against armed robbers, home invaders and murderers, who will never be disarmed by any Government or police force—and history has shown this. This Government, by prohibiting qualified persons from obtaining firearms for self-defence, is acting unconstitutionally in my opinion.

The Government will argue that it can make laws for the peace, order and good government of the people. This Government argues, just as Hitler did, that its firearms laws are increasing the safety of society. But that is not what the crime figures indicate. If we can learn anything from history, that is certainly not what history clearly illustrates. We believe that enabling properly qualified and trained people to defend themselves with firearms does contribute to the peace, order and good government of the people.

The deterrent effect of random distribution of people who can defend themselves with firearms will reduce the attacks on people and property and will reduce the number of victims of crime at the expense of criminals. It will work in the same way that random breath testing is reducing drink-driving. It will work in the same way that red-light cameras are working. It is obvious that criminals will think very, very carefully before attacking someone who is or who may be armed, and this is the best, cheapest and quickest way for the Government and the taxpayer to reduce crime.

This absolute fact remains: as long as the Parliament prevents its constituents from effectively defending themselves, especially in their own homes, the blood of every victim of crime in this State will lie on the members of this House who do not support effective self-defence.

I was a serving police officer in this State from 1977 to 1998—some 22 years. I did not have to wear a gun at all when I was first sworn in. As a matter of fact, I did not get a gun for some nine months after I was sworn in. At a time of the most lax gun laws relating to registration and the highest proportion of society owning firearms, the police and the protectors of our society did not have to wear or use one. This shows how the trend to violence in society has grown, and I have seen it grow from my own experience.

We have invented new sections of the Criminal Code to describe the rage and violence of our society. We now have torture in the code as an offence. We have incidents of road rage, phone rage and computer rage. We have drifted a long way from the more peaceful society that we once were. In all of this, I cannot blame firearms, knives, axes, hoes, machetes, hammers or any other tool used to kill. People kill. And until this Government moves to address the core issues that push people to violence, the trend will continue.

Time expired.
