



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

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PROSTITUTION BILL

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (12.28 p.m.): I would prefer that this House debate the future of our children and their children, or our unemployed, or projects to address those issues. Instead, we are debating an issue that reflects the continual eroding of our social fabric. We are debating the symptoms, not addressing the problems.

The arguments for the legalisation of brothels are convincing and they are espoused by many politicians, police officers, public health experts and even some ministers of religion. As society becomes freer and more progressive—and that is a definition of the new age social engineers—activities such as prostitution and drug taking are intruding more and more into our everyday lives. Those who oppose the new morality are branded reactionary and are ridiculed in the public forum. Life can be very difficult for those who endeavour to resist these new forces. All who oppose this legislation are not suggesting that the needs of those who wish to exit the industry should not be addressed; we do not suggest that they do not need or should not get assistance to do so. No-one suggests that the health issues should not be addressed, because they should. No-one would deny to anyone what is fundamentally basic humanity.

I cannot help but smile when I hear prostitution described as the world's oldest profession. Professions are something of which those who work in them can be very proud—doctors, lawyers, architects, botanists— name any profession and those involved will tell you that they are proud to tell the world of their profession. Recently I was contacted by a prostitute. She prefers to be called a "sex worker". As we spoke on the phone, I heard a young child come running up and start talking to her. Afterwards she apologised and said, "Sorry about that. I don't want the kids hearing. You understand." Yes, I understood. She did not want her children to know her occupation. She definitely was not proudly standing up and telling the world of her choice of career.

A member of the world's oldest profession was once known as a "prostitute" and is now known as a "sex worker". Militant feminists and the politically correct have given this description to women and men, girls and boys who are selling their bodies in an endeavour to give some acceptability and respectability to the practising of what at the very best could be called a dubious occupation. Those who promote the industry using slick and clever language cast prostitutes in the roles of marriage counsellors, therapists, confidants and virtual psychologists; they never ever use the word "prostitute". The politically correct terminology today is "sex worker".

Let us look at another definition of the role of a prostitute. This is from a UN statement. It states—

"Prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution, are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and endanger the welfare of the individual, the family and the community."

That is not my definition, although I agree with it; that is the definition of "prostitution" endorsed by the international community through the United Nations Covenant on Trafficking in Persons and the Exploitation of Others Through Prostitution 1951. Australian leaders obviously agreed with that UN covenant because Australia is a signatory to that covenant.

Yes, prostitution has been with us since early times, but so has murder, abuse, paedophilia, bestiality, theft, discrimination—in fact, all forms of human rights discrimination. Article 6 of the UN

Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which was signed by Australia in 1981, states—

"... prostitution, even when willingly engaged in by a prostitute is a violation of the Human Rights of all women. It is a predatory, exploitative vice, which preys on the vulnerability of others with serious social consequences."

So will this Labor Government, after forcing this brothel legalisation legislation through and endorsing the proliferation of prostitution onto the people of Queensland, then move to have murder, abuse, paedophilia, bestiality, theft, tax avoidance or discrimination legalised? Honourable members are right, of course; murder is taking things a little bit too far and we certainly must prosecute the tax evaders!

Where will this Government draw a line? After all, what we are looking at here is only a difference of opinion as to what is socially acceptable sexual behaviour. For many reasons which have been addressed here today, I do not regard prostitution as acceptable. This Labor Government does and has recognised that by the introduction of this Bill. I do not think that paedophilia is acceptable. I do not believe bestiality is acceptable but, in both these instances, there are those in our community who do. What will happen when people of those views enter Parliament as MPs and obtain the office of Minister? Will a Bill then appear before the House making those practices a little more acceptable?

Shooting galleries and the use of drugs were once totally abhorrent to the average person. Is there an agenda to desensitise the general populace to all things often described as alternative? In relation to prostitution, we have become familiar with the terminology. We have had the legalisation of prostitution for a single prostitute operating from a private dwelling. We have become helpless to protect our own because we virtually have no rights to save our children from themselves.

Girls and boys as young as 12 walk the streets, pose for pornographic material, are intimidated by their peers, they may need money for drugs and then they are trapped in a way of life that they cannot escape. This opens up the possibility of paedophilia and other abuses for the child. We should be fighting the drug problem with severe measures, fighting to keep our children out of this kind of lifestyle, not encouraging them into prostitution by taking away the stigma. I am not sure which member said it, but there is the perception in the community that, if it is legal, it is okay. It is not okay for my grand-daughter and grandsons.

We should be fighting for job creation of a kind that our communities would be proud to endorse and welcome into their towns. In good times when unemployment is low, the economic pressures that encourage a lot of people into prostitution are virtually non-existent. In Third World countries, prostitution is part and parcel of the everyday economy, providing a living for participants and their families. Of course, even in good times, vice follows dollars irrespective of race, colour or creed.

The 200 metre limit of brothels from schools is really a joke. Many children in our area walk well and truly more than 200 metres to school. Are our children going past these brothels on the way to and from school? Are they going to be targeted as future employees? Is the cute little blonde with the big blue eyes going to be offered \$50 or \$100 to just come in and be "nice". Honourable members should never underestimate the power of peer pressure, never underestimate the power of temptation to do something that mum and dad would not approve of, never underestimate the thrill of doing something thought of as a little bit wicked and never underestimate the power of having a child's peers being envious because the child has more cash than they have. They should not say that it will not happen; it will. It happens now and the only difference is that soon working brothels will be legal.

This Government will be remembered for discarding the will of the majority for the perceived depravity of the minority. Homosexuals are a minority group and Labor forced their will to be legitimised onto the people of Queensland. Prostitutes are a minority group. Labor is fighting for them to expand from home operation to legalised brothels. Paedophiles are a minority group. The Government should not be surprised if I do not believe that it will not draw a line and fight for their sexual freedoms, too. It has been my belief that the Government should fight for all and the majority view should be the accepted view. Once again, this Government has got it wrong in believing that this is what the people want. As with homosexuality, the community lives with it. We live with prostitution, but the majority does not want Queensland to legitimise brothels, especially not in their own towns.

Prostitution is often described as victimless. It is not victimless. Those people should say that it is victimless to the people who contract AIDS, their wives and children and the prostitutes who were beaten and raped and murdered. This Bill will not stop any of that happening. Those people should say that to those who cannot pay their bills because dad or mum has been to a prostitute; they are not cheap. They should try telling mums and dads that prostitution is victimless when they find out how their kids are making a living. Society as a whole has become a victim.

Prostitution has been with us since early times. No-one argues with that point, but no amount of public relations can conceal the fact that it is all about human weakness, poverty, disease, drug abuse,

greed and lust. When people sell themselves for whatever reason, they are demeaning themselves by allowing their bodies to be used as chattels.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mrs PRATT: There is no love in the cold, commercial coupling of a prostitute and customer.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mrs PRATT: As Australia loses more and more of its manufacturing base overseas, it limits the employment opportunities of those Australians willing to work at any reasonable job. The lack of any single national development project means that these opportunities are further limited. The increasing division between the city and bush and the slow strangulation of our flourishing provincial centres push more and more Australians off to the cities in search of the dream which often turns into a nightmare for them and their families. Like homosexuality and drugs and because the Government is prepared to put forward legislation such as this, prostitution seems more likely to flourish than wane in the short term. Until the general community becomes concerned enough to let their objections be heard—

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! It is obvious that the member is not taking interjections. She should be heard in silence.

Mrs PRATT: Until the general community become concerned enough to let their objections be heard loud and clear by their MPs, nothing will change. This Government has the numbers and can force this Bill through, and it will. I have heard many call on the Premier to allow members of the Labor Party to have a conscience vote. Some of the Labor members have stated that they are free to make that choice. Forgive me for not believing them, but until one of them who has made it very clear that their constituents oppose this Bill, until one of them stands up and puts their constituents before the party, until one of them eventually crosses the floor, I will remain sceptical.

While ordinary Queenslanders continue to vote for parties, this abuse of power will continue to the detriment of society. Our future is in the hands of the people. I respect the worth of women. I respect the worth of men. I respect the worth of girls. I respect the worth of boys. I will not endorse any Bill which encourages their exploitation. Labor has always pushed for the advancement of the status of women. I find it difficult to equate that view with the promotion of this Bill by Labor members. This Government has failed to listen to those in the industry who believe this Bill will not work. This Government has failed to listen to the police, the ones who will endeavour to enforce this Bill, who say it will not work. This Government has failed to listen to the people of Queensland, the majority of whom do not find this Bill acceptable.

It has been said by the member for Mansfield that this is a brave Government for tackling this issue. No-one disputes that. This is a difficult area to tackle. But, again, it is not an issue to be rushed. The Minister has spent over a year on the issue. A year is not very long. A year is nothing when we acknowledge the workload of individual Ministers. I do not know if "brave" is quite the right word, but I think perhaps it is a little foolish of the Government not to recognise that there is a need to protect society as a whole. It is better to raise the minority to the level of society than to drag society to the level of the minority.

I believe that everyone recognises the hope contained in this Bill, but that hope is reliant on the human factor, and we all know that human beings are fallible. I recognise the hope in this Bill, but I also believe it is an issue that needs a lot more attention. I would ask the Minister to allow more time to address the concerns of all affected by this Bill—prostitute and public alike. I cannot support this Bill.
