



Speech by

HARRY BLACK

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Hansard 25 May 1999

WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BLACK (Whitsunday—ONP) (9.20 p.m.): In relation to the flimsy contribution made by the Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Moggill, one would expect that a man with as many qualifications as the Leader of the Liberal Party would be reasonably intelligent, but there appear to be reasonable grounds to refute that supposition. For example, the Leader of the Liberal Party cannot or will not recognise the difference between the causes of violence in our society and the outlets used to vent that violence. The causes of domestic violence are many, but the most important ingredients of domestic violence and violence in our society are poverty, unemployment and economic desperation, caused by the implementation of the simplistic theories that the member for Moggill used to preach at university. Goodness only knows how much domestic violence the Leader of the Liberal Party has caused over the years, blinded by ideology in his role as the patron saint of global economics in the Queensland Liberal Party.

Yes, the religion of economic rationalism is the root cause of violence in our society, not firearms. Queenslanders have owned firearms for 150 years, but a violent society is only a recent abomination. A family losing its source of income becomes an unhappy family in which quarrels will develop, but anyone, with the exception of the Leader of the Liberal Party, can see that prohibiting the ownership of firearms will not stop the problem. The Leader of the Liberals says that he does not want Australia to become like America; he wants Australia to be Australian. So do we, and that is why One Nation was formed—to keep Australia Australian. But unfortunately, thanks to the Liberal philosophies and policies of people such as the member for Moggill, we are now aping the Americans more than ever before. We are aping the Americans in terms of crime, drugs, racial problems, cultural destruction, political correctness, movies, food, clothing, media, foreign policy—you name it. I point out to the well-educated but intellectually stunted member for Moggill that the people of Queensland have enjoyed a long and harmonious association with their firearms, and that our disintegrating, dysfunctional, violent and immoral society is a direct result of people such as him forcing Americanisation on us.

The member for Moggill mentioned a study conducted by Kellerman and Reay in 1986. He should know that the claims made by Kellerman and Reay are a gross distortion of the truth and that this study has now been thoroughly discredited. What the member for Moggill has not told the House is that 85% of Mr Kellerman's homicides caused by "someone you know" were in fact suicides. Another 8% of the data was considered unreliable and the remaining 7% included drug dealers, gang members and criminals killing each other. I must say again that I am surprised by the lack of academic professionalism displayed by the Leader of the Liberal Party. How does the well-educated member for Moggill explain the incidence of suicide in Japan, where civilian ownership of firearms is banned?

As to the 1688 Bill of Rights—this Act is in operation in Queensland as evidenced by the Imperial Acts Application Act 1984. It is irrelevant to our argument that the Bill of Rights mentioned Protestants, as section 116 of the Australian Constitution guarantees us freedom of religion. However, what is relevant is that the 1688 Bill of Rights very clearly confers a right to possess arms suitable for self-defence, in addition to arms as allowed by law.

The Liberal Party Leader may argue to the contrary all he likes, but until the matter is settled in a court the debate will go on. The right to self-defence is an inalienable right—a God-given right—which no Government can remove. However, it is meaningless without the means to protect oneself. Because

our Police Service cannot protect us, people will demand access to firearms to protect themselves. As long as they are good law-abiding Queenslanders, we will support them all the way.

I will read to the House part of a letter sent to a Townsville constituent on 6 August 1990. It states—

"Dear Mr Constituent,

Thank you for your letter of 31st July regarding the State Government's proposed changes to Queensland's firearms legislation.

The Liberal Party does not support the registration proposals advanced by the Labor government as we believe the scheme is neither effective in preventing crime nor easy to administer.

The Liberal Party believes that a register of people prohibited from owning firearms should be established ..."

Mr Deputy Speaker, whom do you suppose sent this letter to this constituent? It was none other than the Leader of the Liberal Party, Dr David Watson. We now see that the Leader of the Liberal Party is a political prostitute who will say and do anything to con the voters.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mickel): Order! That is unparliamentary. The honourable member will withdraw.

Mr BLACK: I withdraw. The Leader of the National Party should also join the Liberal Party, which is where he really belongs, because he is a millstone around the National Party's neck—an albatross dragging the National Party down into oblivion.

This speech tonight is based on fact, not hysteria or supposition. In all of the hysteria surrounding the national gun grab, precious little use has been made of factual information concerning firearms, crime and suicide, and I will attempt to inject some commonsense into the discussion. National firearm legislation disarms only honest law-abiding citizens, not criminals or sinister people with sinister thoughts. I have always believed that the buyback would be ineffective in stopping crimes committed with firearms, and the facts and figures reveal that this is the case. The most important fact is that crimes committed with guns have increased since the gun grab.

Inspector John McCoomb, the head of the Weapons Licensing Branch, stated in the Sunday Mail on 24 January 1999 that crimes involving guns had soared during and since the buyback. In 1997, robberies involving guns leapt 39%, and assaults involving guns have climbed 28%. If anyone is qualified to talk about corruption in the buyback, it is Inspector McCoomb. I am appalled by the disgraceful treatment that Inspector McCoomb has been subjected to just because he told the truth. Ample evidence of buyback corruption was presented to the House by the Police Minister when he was in Opposition, and lately by the member for Caboolture. It is absolutely outrageous in this post-Fitzgerald era that Inspector McCoomb is being persecuted for his whistleblowing efforts. How has he been rewarded for his integrity? He has been removed from his job. I understand that he is fighting this barbaric decision in the industrial relations system. He has our best wishes and full support in this grubby affair. I would expect that the Police Minister would leap to his defence considering his vociferous condemnation of the administration of the buyback scheme when he was in Opposition. Why has the member for Waterford suddenly gone quiet now that he is the Minister?

To further prove my point that armed crime has escalated since the buyback, we have only to look at the Courier-Mail for Wednesday, 10 March 1999. The front page tells us that armed robbers stole an armoured car, and page 3 tells us that a girl was tied up and held hostage by two teenage home invaders armed with a pistol and a pump-action shotgun. Pistols have been very heavily regulated for 80 years and most pump-action shotguns are now illegal. Why did the thieves not hand in their weapons? Do they not have any respect for the law? The answer is: no. The new gun laws are an inconvenience to honest people and an impediment to the right to self-defence, but they are no inconvenience at all to criminals. Just last week a bandit menaced a Calamvale service station attendant three times in the same day using a knife and a hand gun. Police officers discovered later that he had an SKS rifle in his possession. The question needs to be asked again: why did the bandit not hand in his pistol and SKS rifle during the buyback?

The CJC report, A Snapshot of Crime in Queensland, from the research paper series, Volume 5, No. 1 of February 1999, states an interesting fact, namely, that armed robbery rose 112% from 17 per 100,000 of population in 1989-90 to 36 per 100,000 in 1997-98. Although the CJC figures stop at 1997-98, anecdotal evidence from press reports indicates that the incidence of armed robbery is still increasing.

These are alarming figures and they demonstrate that the prevalence of armed robbery has not been affected by the gun buyback one iota. The CJC report also states that drug offences in Queensland have increased from 365 per 100,000 of population in 1989-90 to 992 in 1997-98. The

CJC believes that these figures are an overstatement of the true situation. Be that as it may, drug use is increasing and it would be fair to assume that much of the increase in armed robbery is the result of drug addicts stealing money and property to feed their habits.

Banning guns will not curb drug-induced armed robbery as drug-crazed bandits will not comply with the ban. According to the CJC report, in 1997 armed robbery in Queensland occurred at the rate of 36.55 per 100,000 population, whereas the Australian average for the same period was 48.64 per 100,000. The significance of this is that Queensland has a higher concentration of lawful firearm owners than the Australian average, yet has a lower rate of armed robbery. What does that indicate? It indicates that lawful firearm ownership is not a causal factor in armed robbery.

I turn now to suicide. An Australian Bureau of Statistics press release on 15 January 1999 says that, although suicides attributed to firearms decreased by 14% in 1997, suicides due to hanging, strangulation and suffocation rose by 25% and suicides overall were the highest yet recorded at 2,723 persons. It should be apparent to all thinking members that suicide is increasing, that suicide is caused by the social ills plaguing our society and that people desperate enough to kill themselves will do it regardless of whether firearms are available or not.

An Australian Bureau of Statistics press release of 26 February 1997 states that, although there were 10,150 firearm-related deaths in the period 1980 to 1995, these accounted for just 0.5% of all deaths registered. We can see from ABS publication 3302, Principal Causes of Death 1995, that over 122,000 people died that year from various diseases and accidents. Indeed, in the Australian on 15 March 1999 we learned that medical mistakes resulted in the deaths of 10,000 to 14,000 Australians per year, probably largely due to economic rationalism induced cost cutting.

It should be obvious to even the most closed-minded members in this House that firearm-related deaths are only a minuscule proportion of all mortalities and that we would save far more money by spending \$500m on hospitals, ambulances, drug education or any other number of projects than we have by confiscating firearms from good, honest Queenslanders.

I look around this Parliament and I see many well-educated members qualified in law, education and economics, but they seem unable or unwilling to understand that criminals have not yet handed their guns in and never will. They seem unable or unwilling to comprehend that the new gun laws have spawned a lucrative and expanding industry in the illicit importation, dealing and even manufacture of weapons. They seem unable or unwilling to concede that crime and suicide thrive in a dysfunctional society and are not related to the presence or absence of firearms or other weapons. They cannot or will not admit that many, many more lives would have been saved by not wasting \$500m on buying back a tiny fraction of the Australian gun collection from people who were never going to break the law anyway. Most alarmingly, they are unable to admit their error, even when presented with the sorts of undeniable evidence appearing every second day in our newspapers.

While I do not agree with most of the utopian diatribe churned out by the United Nations, I do agree with part of a report entitled General and Complete Disarmament: Small Arms of 27 August 1997. It states—

"When the state loses control over its security functions and fails to maintain the security of its citizens, the subsequent growth of armed violence, banditry and organised crime increases the demand for weapons by citizens seeking to protect themselves and their property."

Are we not witnessing the beginning of such a scenario in Australia? Can we blame shooters for being reluctant to surrender their firearms and reducing their ability to defend themselves and their families? What is the future likely to hold for Queensland firearm owners? Unfortunately, I believe that the future of sporting firearm ownership in Australia is bleak.

The United Nations is now taking more than a passing interest in the issue of civilian ownership of firearms. While the philosophies and policies of the United Nations in relation to small arms are relevant to many troubled parts of the world suffering from civil strife and war, they are not applicable to Australia. There are now a plethora of United Nations reports, resolutions, committees and press releases examining every aspect of small arms use and distribution—military and civilian—and proposed methods to reduce them. For example, the United Nations Study Group on Ammunition and Explosives has prepared a questionnaire for member states, including Australia, to complete. It asks for a national inventory of importers, exporters, dealers and manufacturers, and quantities of explosives and ammunition. No doubt the Australian Government of the day will eagerly sign any future disarmament treaties, as it has signed every United Nations treaty to date, and the Queensland Government will be forced to dance to Canberra's tune once again.

Let me quote the former Federal Labor Minister, Peter Walsh. He said—

"I am not a monarchist and never have been, but find it ironic that so many contemporary Australians are determined to protect us from the non-existent threat of English tyranny to fall over each other in a scramble to surrender Australian sovereignty to a ratbag and bobtail of unrepresentative United Nations committees accountable to nobody."

The only bright spot is the fact that the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia has been awarded non-Government organisation status by the United Nations by virtue of its accumulating 100,000 members, although I do not think it is using its lobby power effectively. Another positive development has been the inauguration of the world forum on the future of sport shooting activities, which aims to encourage new participants into sport shooting and to provide correct and factual information on firearm issues. The New South Wales Labor Government has also passed the Home Invasion (Occupants Protection) Act 1998, which enshrines the right to self-defence in the home and provides criminal and civil immunity to the defender.

I urge members to pass this Bill in order to prevent unsuitable persons from legally acquiring firearms and enable lawful Queensland firearm owners to go about their business with a minimum of Governmental interference.
