



Speech by

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WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—IND) (8.30 p.m.): In speaking to the Weapons Amendment Bill, I would like to discuss a related area that has been totally ignored by State and Federal Governments alike—that is, the issue of violence in the media and its contribution to violent crime. If Governments are serious about reducing violent crime they must work on the underlying causes, and there are many of these.

Rather than prohibiting law-abiding citizens from owning certain types of firearms, which in reality is only the prelude to confiscating all privately held firearms in Australia, we should be looking at the factors which produce violent people. I think we all have some idea of the factors that contribute to people becoming violent. Some of these factors are drug addiction, unemployment, poverty and family breakdown. But there is another very important factor that has received scant acknowledgment by politicians and even less action—that is, violence in the media.

Since all Governments to date have been powerless to stop this scourge of unemployment, drug addiction and poverty, they have decided on the illogical course of action of banning firearms in the vain hope it will fix the problem. But it will not fix the problem. It will only make politicians look like they are fixing the problem. This course of action was developed in the wake of a tragedy and used to appease people's fears at a time when the whole nation was emotionally distraught. Obviously very little thought was put into the actual causes of firearms misuse. Very little thought was put into developing the legislation and very little consideration was given to its ramifications.

John Howard used the tragedy to make a mark and to appear to be strong and to have made a stand to comfort the victims, while not improving the firearms laws in this country. The guns buyback legislation does nothing to make Australia safe from weapons misuse. The reason is that it has no effect upon the underlying causes. It is similar to taking a tablet for a cold. It might relieve the symptom, but it does not cure the cold. The Port Arthur tragedy was used for political point scoring—an insult to the victims and their families.

The Prime Minister acknowledged the effect of media violence upon Martin Bryant. After the Port Arthur tragedy John Howard made a promise to do something about the violence in the media. But what has he done? Nothing. I lost a lot of respect for John Howard over that comment. At least he had the decency to realise that there were problems with violent videos and with violence in the media, but he failed to act on that realisation and he lost my respect.

The recent Littleton massacre revealed the importance of the violence which is a part of people's lives. The Australian Institute of Criminology publication No. 55, entitled *The Portrayal of Violence in the Media: Impacts and Implications for Policy*, contained a number of findings. These included that violence on the screen is related to increasing aggression, desensitisation to violence and increased fear of crime, that violence in the media may contribute to violent crime but is not the single cause, and that the general public is concerned about the effects of on-screen violence. Most alarmingly, the report found that children are at most risk from these effects and that young adults may also be at risk.

In the same report Professor Leonard Eron, from the American Psychological Association, contended that television violence is a significant factor but not the only cause of aggression and violence in society today. He said that aggressive behaviour is the product of a number of interacting

factors, including genetic, psychological, neurological and environmental. It is only when there is a convergence of factors that violent behaviour occurs.

The professor is correct when he says that it is the convergence of a number of factors which causes violence. Today in Queensland, and indeed Australia, we are experiencing such a convergence of factors producing violence—escalating drug use, escalating unemployment, escalating poverty and the destruction of families—which to date Governments have been powerless to stop. It is no wonder we are experiencing the surge of violence that we are, and until all Governments, State and Federal, act to reduce the underlying causes of violence, no progress will be made.

Television, movie, computer and print violence appears to be growing at an alarming rate. Although the classification and censorship of material is the responsibility of the Federal Government, members of the State Government should push the Federal Government strongly for the issue to be taken seriously by all Governments, for only by addressing the contributing factors to violence will violence be decreased. Some responsibility for the violent content of our media must fall upon Governments, for only Governments have the power through legislation and regulation to effect change.

The current trendy attitude amongst politicians is that Governments should not restrict violence because Governments should not preach morals to people. They scream that censorship is bad and that adults should be allowed to watch anything they like. While that may be the case, young people are exposed to too much violence from a very young and impressionable age. But if the Government will not take some sort of responsibility on the issue of violence in the media, who on earth will? Can we afford to leave it to Hollywood to dictate what sorts of programs our kids watch? What sort of role models are we providing for our children so that they can learn what sort of behaviour is acceptable and what is not? Surely we do not wish our children to inherit and adopt a set of Hollywood morals.

With so many churches morally bankrupt and with natural families containing a mother and father becoming a rarity, who else but Government can make a change? With regard to broken families, the lack of a father role model is a particular problem with young males, who, unfortunately, are responsible for most of the violence and crime in society. The lack of family role models and support means that many young people probably model their actions on movie stars or rock stars, which is a frightening thought. The editorial of the Sunday Mail on 28 February 1999 said that it is futile to hope that a culture that enshrines violent heroes will not produce violent children.

The movie and entertainment industry is a very powerful lobbying force. This is the main reason Governments are paralysed on the issue of violence in the media. In the book *The Global Trap*, Dr Hans Martin says that we will soon enter the age of the 80/20 society, where only 20% of the current work force will be required to produce the goods and services of society and the other 80% will have to be kept occupied by "tittytainment"—a combination of sex fantasy and, presumably, copious violence. Perhaps this is the reason we must have so much violence on television.

Although it will not be easy, politicians should talk to the people—not consultants charging exorbitant fees, but normal constituents—and develop a course of action. They might be pleasantly surprised and enlightened to find that ordinary people have a good grasp of the problems and the solutions. With the solutions will come the understanding that firearms do not cause violence in our society but that people are affected by the violence they see.

Banning firearms is not and never will be the end of violence in our society. As firearm related crimes have fallen, we have seen the rise of violence committed with knives, swords and other offensive weapons.

Government members interjected.

Mr KNUTH: I suppose the interjecting members of the Labor Party would not believe that. We must work to end the violence, not the firearm ownership of good, law-abiding citizens. It is for these reasons that I commend this Bill to the House.

I will restate a comment made to me by a man I met in my travels. He said to me, "Governments will not stop banning weapons until they ban the stones from the side of the road." He is probably right, because most politicians in this country are too afraid to recognise the real issues behind crime in this land. They think that banning the instrument will prevent crime. How false! The recent firearm buyback scheme has proved that none of this is working. Crime is still escalating. I ask: will the next step be to remove all firearms in existence? Maybe that is what members opposite really want. Surely that will stop the killing. Wrong again!

The other night, I watched a Four Corners program on Rwanda, where the greatest genocidal act witnessed in 50 years took place within four months. Approximately 1.2 million people were butchered—not by guns, bombs or hi-tech weapons, but by axes, machetes, knives and rocks. The Four Corners program proclaimed that these murders outdid Hitler's and Stalin's genocidal acts in World War II by the fact that they were able to commit these atrocities in such a short time.

Yes, we can ban guns, knives and swords. And if that does not stop the killing, we can then ban machetes, axes, ropes and sleeping pills, and then even the stones on the side of the road. I think it is time for us, as politicians, to refrain from pandering to the expertise of the all-knowing elite sections of the media and the academic fraternity and seek for ourselves with an open mind what is behind all this violence. What drove a man to pick up a weapon, and what motivated him to massacre 35 people at Port Arthur?

What is the link between violence on the screen, children's video games, alcohol, drugs and pornography? I recall watching a video on one of America's horrific mass murderers, Ted Bundy. He gave an account of how his interest in soft porn turned into hard porn, which in itself turned into snuff porn. This led him to start acting out his own real-life fantasies by murdering dozens of women. I could go on about this video, but I do not have the time. The apocalypse of this video ends with his confession. When asked by Dr James Dobson, one of America's leading psychologists, "Do you believe that there is a link between violence on the screen, pornography and murder?", he said, "Most certainly. Everything I have done is a result of these activities." I believe that it is time for a public inquiry, or perhaps even a royal commission, to investigate these links to violence. Let us open our eyes to alternative measures, instead of singling out law-abiding firearm owners—people from all walks of life who enjoy their sport as much as anyone else enjoys theirs.

What must be remembered is that, prior to the last 25 years, firearm ownership was more common than it is now, yet crime was minimal. Now, with less firearm ownership, crime is rampant. This is proven in statistics from the Australian Institute of Criminology. Let us look at Switzerland—a country with the highest firearm ownership in the world, a country where it is mandatory for every household to own a military assault rifle. Yet crime is virtually non-existent in Switzerland. Is this because of the emphasis on the strength of the family unit? Whatever the reason, Switzerland is an example that the anti-gun lobby does not wish to discuss. The same can be said for Iceland, Finland and Sweden.

Let us look at Japan—a country with very low firearm ownership, yet the highest suicide rate of any Western nation. I do not wish to keep going into statistics, because statistics will prove time and time again that the anti-gun lobby has got it wrong. Now, let us look at the anti-gun lobby. Who can remember Rebecca Peters? Well, Miss Rebecca Peters, whom I believe—according to SSAA reports—has had a sex change, is now leading a group who wishes to legalise dangerous drugs such as heroin, crack and speed for young Australians. So what we have here is someone who is not quite sure whether they are Arthur or Martha, who set out on a crusade to ban all firearms from Australia and is now advocating that we kill our children with drugs. This shows the sort of lunacy of the so-called moral few who wish to set such high standards by proclaiming the banning of firearms to save lives. I think this person has lost all credibility and should never be taken seriously again.

The purpose of my speech is to gain support from my parliamentary colleagues in seeking the answers and initiating an all-out inquiry into why crime is escalating, why our society is becoming more violent, and to tackle the cause of that problem. Members opposite can ridicule me as much as they want to, but the fact is that the statistics are there, the truth is there. Violence is becoming more and more prevalent in society today. Yes, we can ban all the firearms. I wish that we could take away every firearm in this country for 12 months just to prove members opposite wrong. The facts are that it does not matter what a person has in their hands; if they want to commit a violent crime, they will find a weapon and they will commit the crime.

My wife needs her kitchen knife, and farmers and fishermen and people on the land in all sorts of jobs need theirs. Do we really want to go that far? Or do we, as representatives of our constituents, really want to find the cure for crime in our society? I think that is the better choice. That is why we are in this Chamber tonight. It is not to blame the people who are not committing the crime; it is to look at why the crimes are being committed. That is what we should be doing.

I support this Bill. It is realistic. It is actually more detrimental to the cause of criminals in our society. It actually makes it harder for criminals to access firearms while easing the burden for law-biding citizens to continue their legitimate sport, as they have done in the past. I owned one of those SKS assault rifles. I would be lucky to go shooting once a year. But I like to know that I have a firearm in my safe. I was not a criminal, but I was branded a criminal because I had a firearm. I did not commit that crime in Port Arthur and I am quite sure that a lot of other Queenslanders did not, either. But Queenslanders were very hurt by the proposed gun changes. They felt as though they were the criminals, and that is why they protested at the last election.

I am really amazed—and it is hard to believe—that some constituents in my electorate who still support Labor like to fire firearms. But slowly, they are coming to their senses. They see the Labor Party's resistance to the ownership of firearms and they are starting to come over. I thank them for their wisdom.

Mr Dalglish: There can't be many of them.

Mr KNUTH: There are a few. There are not a lot.

Mr Pearce: We'll see after the next election.

Mr KNUTH: Either way, they will not be supporting the honourable member's bunch.

I support this Bill. I believe that it is a good Bill, despite the criticisms from members on one side of this House.
