



Speech by

JEFF KNUTH

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Hansard 26 May 1999

STOLEN GENERATION

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—IND) (3.22 p.m.): I agree with some of the views expressed by those on the Government side of the Chamber, one of them being that a lot of Aboriginals are not really asking for anything. But there are a lot of Aboriginals who are asking for something. I do not think even the Aboriginals themselves actually know what they really want. That is one of the biggest problems being experienced in the north. Honourable members might argue against that.

I am a member of the Assembly of God church. It is well known that that church has the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in this country attending it. I can get on with the Aboriginals and Islanders in my church. There is no problem because we are reconciled by God. We do not sit there and talk about land rights or past problems. We look at helping the Aboriginal community in our towns and suburbs.

If we were to look into the past and discuss past problems, I could go on for hours about some of the terrible crimes that have been perpetrated against the whole of humanity. My forefathers were German immigrants. They were Catholic Germans forced off their land in East Prussia. They ended up coming to the Burdekin in 1873. They settled in the Burdekin/Charters Towers area. They worked very hard. They got into the pastoral business, running a lot of cattle properties. But when World Wars I and II came along, a lot of them ended up in internment camps. They had been in this country for 40 years by the time World War I hit. By the time World War II came along they had been here for 60 years. What did they do wrong? They were thrown in internment camps, but they thought they were Australians. After the wars, life went on. They did not hold any grudges. They just forgot about it. It happened. It is a sad part of our history.

The same sorts of things happened to a lot of the Italian immigrants in the Burdekin. After the war they were called all sorts of names—for being here and for making a success of themselves. But they did not hold a grudge. They got on with their lives and a lot of them have made successes of their cane farms and businesses. They forgot about the past.

Before a person can ask for forgiveness, there has to be a truly repentant heart. If we say, "Yes, we are sorry", will the people who want this apology forgive us and get on with things? A lot of Aboriginals come and visit me and stay in my home. A good friend of ours happens to be Eddie Mabo's daughter. Her son stays at our place quite regularly. We agree on the problems facing Aboriginals today. How many members on the Government side of the House can say that they have Aboriginal friends who live with them or stay with them on a regular basis?

Mr Nelson: Very few.

Mr KNUTH: I agree with the member for Tablelands.

Mr Reeves: How would you know?

Mr KNUTH: Can the member for Mansfield say that he does? He cannot, because no Government members can. They profess to know all about the plight of Aboriginals in this country, but very few of them have anything to do with Aboriginals.

Mr Reeves: Ha, ha!

Mr KNUTH: The member for Mansfield can laugh.

Mr Pitt: I do.

Mr KNUTH: I take the word of the member for Mulgrave.

Mr Mulherin: I do.

Mr KNUTH: And the member for Mackay. They all agree with what I am saying. Why is it that I can get on with the Aboriginals and not have somebody saying to me, "Are you sorry?" Why should I be sorry? What have I got to be sorry for? What have I done? I have done nothing! I never caused any of the problems of the past, so why should I say sorry? Right now I have the executive of One Nation trying to make me say sorry for something I never said, and I will not. I will not say sorry, because I never said it. I never did anything to the Aboriginals in this country. I did not take their land from them——

Mr Welford: Aren't you sorry that they think you said it?

Mr KNUTH: I am not sorry for anything, actually. I suppose I am sorry that they think I said it. I can look Aboriginals in the eye——

Mr Feldman: As an equal.

Mr KNUTH: The member for Caboolture raises a good point—as an equal. I do not consider them before me or after me, above me or below me. They are equal brothers. But I do not have to say sorry for anything, because I have done nothing wrong. I challenge any member of this House to tell me what I have done to the Aboriginal people.

When I was with One Nation I was ridiculed by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy for being a racist. Why was I a racist? Because I said they are simplistic people? That is great. I think it is wonderful. I love that they are simplistic, because they look at things how they are, not in an academic way using terminology that people do not understand. They are simple people and I love them for that. I have been to and worked on Palm Island. I know these people. I have had Aboriginals working for me——

Ms Spence: Some of them are judges. Some of them are university lecturers.

Mr KNUTH: That is great. I want them to be that. I, on behalf of a lot of Queenslanders, want to know what we have done to these people. Our forefathers may have done some wrong, but our forefathers had wrong done by them. We need only to look back through history to see this. The Danes invaded England. The Romans invaded England. Do we apologise to them? Where does it all end? I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that all this does is keep this matter going.

Mr Feldman: It keeps dividing.

Mr KNUTH: It does keep dividing. It divides the whole community. I invite all members to make a special trip to my church in the Burdekin to meet the Aboriginal and Islander people in my church, talk about this problem of reconciliation and land rights and see what response they get. It may not be the response that they expect.

Japan did not just declare war on Australia; it actually attacked Australia, and we repelled the Japanese. A lot of the diggers who fought in that war will not forgive, but some have learnt to forgive.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr KNUTH: Whether or not Japan apologises, I do not hold a grudge against Japan. Both my sisters are married to Japanese. Surprise, surprise! My stepmother was actually a Malaysian. Mine is a multicultural family, I suppose. Are we going to hold the Japanese responsible for the next 100 years? No! We have forgotten about that. We welcome them as tourists to our country. We are not asking for or seeking apologies for what was done. What happened in Nazi Germany is finished. It is forgotten. The Jews—the Israeli people—have suffered more than any other race in history. They have forgiven the German people. Many members would have seen the movie Schindler's List about Oskar Schindler, a German who actually helped Jews to escape from the concentration camps. I admit that there is good in everyone and there is bad in some people. But we have to forgive and forget the past. Let us go on. Let us help the Aboriginals. I honestly believe that we should try to get them into work—in any trade. I agree with that. We treat them as human beings, as we accept anyone else.

Mr Reynolds: So why did you go along with Pauline Hanson's racist policies?

Mr KNUTH: I have told the member on many occasions that I did not get into One Nation over racist policies. I got into One Nation because I was sick of the way that this country is going downhill.

Mr Reynolds: You went along with them and you stood beside them.

Mr KNUTH: That does not matter. The honourable member knows that well. All I am saying is that we can keep on going and we can keep on pushing our political agendas for the next 100 years, if necessary, but that is not going to solve the problem. There is no need to apologise for things that we have not done and for which we are not responsible. If that generation come back, okay, they can apologise. But I, for one, will not apologise. I will stand in front of any Aboriginal or Islander and look them in the eyes. I have done that before. We get on quite well. But I do not need to say "sorry".