



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

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PROSTITUTION BILL

Dr KINGSTON (Maryborough—ONP) (5.52 p.m.): This Bill has had me in a dilemma for some time. Whilst I do not condone prostitution on moral grounds, I was hesitant to oppose this Bill if it could be guaranteed that the legalisation of boutique brothels would result in a decrease in sexually transmitted diseases and the accompanying use of soft and hard drugs.

I support the statements and the logic expressed by the member for Thuringowa. I do not doubt the Minister's sincerity and purpose in the framing of this Bill but, as the member for Thuringowa has said, the methodology proposed will not achieve its aims and may recruit people into the industry who would never have considered prostitution as an income source.

Having worked in some of the recognised sin capitals of the world and having seen overt sex industries, I am realistic enough to realise that prostitution is here to stay whether the needs of the market are supplied by an organised, regulated industry or by willing amateurs. I then thought about countries in which prostitution is tolerated, even if not actually legalised, and about countries in which the practice of prostitution is a serious crime. Thailand condones prostitution, admittedly not in the hopefully regulated manner suggested as possible by this Bill. Prostitution flourishes throughout most of the country, with Pat Pong in Bangkok and Pattaya and Had Jai having the centralised commercial centres. Sex tourists flock to these centres. Hopefully some are just spectators, not participants.

Demographic studies of the incidence of AIDS in Thailand are good enough for the University of Songkla to publish that it is at epidemic proportions. Thus the risk is clearly enunciated. There are expensive boutique brothels in Thailand, generally known only by the wealthy locals, with the same club-like atmosphere as suggested by the member for Thuringowa. But studies by the above university show that the majority of the market is seeking the excitement of the overt and dangerous industry. In fact, the risk and the sense of behaving illicitly attracts customers.

The incidence of AIDS in Nairobi is such that 80% of all patients admitted to the equivalent of the base hospital are discharged HIV positive, but prostitution rings working from the lounges of some of the best hotels in Nairobi are well patronised. Statistically, it is equivalent to playing Russian roulette with all of the chambers loaded. Despite that, I have seen well-educated European men indulging regularly.

Due to the socioeconomic conditions in north-east Thailand, it is traditional for young people to travel to the bigger cities such as Bangkok and Khon Kaen to work in factories during the dry season. This is an economic necessity for their extended family. With the Thai authorities not taking severe action against prostitution, there has been a gradual and documented acceptance of prostitution as an income source. Young girls who travel to the cities and work in brothels to accumulate some money are accepted back into their village community. Perhaps their Buddhist beliefs and quiet acceptance shield them from the trauma experienced to some extent.

By contrast, the Thai Government takes decisive and drastic action against drug dealers. Thai jails are not comfortable. In north-east Thailand now, at subsistence village level it is common to see beautiful young girls who have come home to die of AIDS, but it is very uncommon to see a drug addict. The basic facts are that if the socioeconomic environment in Isarn or north-east Thailand improved there would be no need for inexperienced young people to spend the dry seasons at risk in the cities, and if it did not appear that the Government and to some extent society condoned prostitution as an acceptable economic activity, then prostitution would not be overt and frequent.

Let us look at the neighbouring country, Laos. The Lao people are of the same ethnic origin and religion as those of Isarn, but the Lao Government has reacted very strongly to the excesses it saw in Vientiane during the Vietnam War when Vientiane was an R & R centre for troops. This is commonly called western decadence in communist rhetoric. The Lao Government, with communist ruthlessness—I am not advocating that we adopt such ruthless action—deported all the drug addicts left in Vientiane. It then legislated that prostitution was illegal and punishable by a holiday on a barren island in the middle of a hydroelectric dam where the offenders could rethink their life.

There are nightclubs in Laos with a scattering of bar girls, but these girls tell you to go home alone at 11.30 p.m. In Thailand people have a problem extracting themselves from a nightclub without company. The incidence of AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and drug addiction in Laos is very low. My conclusion about this Bill from these considerations of other countries is simple and certainly harder to implement in the longer term. The solution lies further back in the improvement of the socioeconomic situation of the total society.

This becomes more of a concern when one reads the works of authors such as Martin and Schuster who relate the conclusions of a conference in Los Angeles which was attended by 500 of the world's leaders in economics, politics and sociology. They have predicted that 80% of the world's population will be unemployed within the foreseeable future and that the gap between the "withs" and the "withouts" will widen enormously. I recognise the need to address this problem.

I relate to the speech which was made by the member for Fitzroy. I would prefer that this House spent time debating what we do about the future of our children and their children and debating what we do about the socioeconomic problems which are eroding the moral fabric of our society.

I recognise the hope and thrust of this Bill. I congratulate the Minister on having the courage to tackle this difficult subject, but I regret that I cannot support the Bill in its present form.
