



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (9 p.m.): This Bill should be opposed. It in no way reflects the aspirations of the majority of Queenslanders. It is a throwback, a throwback to the maiden speeches of One Nation's world conspiracy theorists. We are asked to believe that a deranged individual such as Bryant was an international agent so that the Prime Minister could change the gun laws. If we ever doubt that, let us revisit that unforgettable debut of the member for Burdekin, when he said—

"The great doublecross of them all was Prime Minister Howard's knee-jerk reaction on the firearm laws, allegedly because of Port Arthur. We now know that Port Arthur had nothing to do with it. That was only the excuse to slug Australians with extremist laws long hidden away in the files, laws hidden away in the dark bogholes of Canberra, awaiting the day when Australian law makers could be scared into passing laws hatched in a far away foreign capital to better fit Australians into their glorified international mould."

That is the absurdity that is driving this legislation in here. This Bill is an attempt to try to cloak the theory with some sort of responsibility. But none of the One Nation members at that time demurred from that paranoid interpretation of this tragic circumstance.

However, in the lead-up to this debate tonight, we have had Ron Owen threaten people who disagree with him on gun control by placing photographs of private homes on the Internet. Presumably this is to ensure that, whilst we are in here in Parliament or away on parliamentary business, we can be reassured that every lunatic with a grudge to bear on any one of us can place our families under potential siege. Owen has the full support of the One Nation Leader in this place in the absurdity that he is carrying on with. Let us bear in mind the mentality and the background that is driving this legislative change here tonight.

Owen's tactics work well in the United States where they have a fluid party system, a system made up of quasi-Independents under which it is easy to scare off politicians or buy off politicians who can be covered by the United States gun lobby. It is often overlooked that the strong Australian two-party system is a bulwark against this type of potentially corrupt behaviour by gun lobbies with bags of money. An Independent is more vulnerable to this narrow style, obsessive standover tactic, but the party system of Westminster with Cabinet Government stands against the corrosive influence of the gun lobby.

When the National and Liberal Party leadership determined that it would oppose this Bill, that was the end of it. The gun lobby cannot buy a preselection in this country in the same way that it can buy a preselection in the United States. It becomes sidelined, resorting to photographing MPs' homes and publishing the photographs on the Internet. It is this type of standover tactic, so repugnant to the Australian way of life, that the member for Caboolture stands shoulder to shoulder with. We should condemn it, and condemn it utterly.

This Bill is for people to defend their homes, we are told. The Criminal Code, developed by Griffith over 100 years ago, refined by Goss and revisited by the coalition adequately allows people to defend their homes with reasonable force, which is why offences against the home carry a higher sentence depending on the hour of night. So reasonable force is well recognised by and enshrined in our Criminal Code, and has been for over a century.

But are armed robberies at home an overwhelming feature of our society? I can recall the windy rhetoric of the member for Crows Nest when he referred to the offence of breaking and entering as a home invasion and the inflated rhetoric of the member for Indooroopilly when he declared, "Well, the next home invasion will be the last one." Regrettably, there are still break and enters. Armed robberies at home constitute 7.4% of all armed robberies—traumatic, devastating, unwarranted, intrusive as they are—but 49% of all armed robberies occurred at retail locations, followed by streets and footpaths at 19%. In other words, One Nation is trying to use the emotive home defence argument for convenience to try to introduce laws that I might say even the United States Senate has been shamed into changing as a direct result of the Colorado incident.

There was an interchange between the Honourable the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing and the honourable member for Hervey Bay when this Parliament last met. I think it showed dramatically that these proposed changes to the firearms laws do not really have the support of One Nation. Let me revisit that exchange. The Minister, "Do you own a gun?" The member for Hervey Bay, "No. I do not own a gun and I do not have a firearm licence. I do not need to."

We revisit when the member for Hervey Bay was first elected. Unfortunately, regrettably, intolerably, the honourable member was the subject of some violence where he was king-hit—a level of violence, I might say, that is visited upon very few people. Yet, even with that direct violence that occurred to him—after all that—the member for Hervey Bay said, "I don't need a gun. Never had to need one." Yet it is a level of violence that has never been directed at most of us. So there the case rests when it comes to the level of support, the level of real need.

So if One Nation is proposing that, by liberalising gun laws, people can kill in their own homes, they are quite correct. Consider this research: the Medical Journal of Australia on 7 October 1991 found that there were 587 deaths by firearms recorded between 1980 and 1989 in Queensland. Of those, 416 were in Brisbane, 159 were outside of Brisbane and 12 were unspecified. Seventy-six per cent of those deaths were by suicide, 18% by homicide, 3% by accident and 3% were unspecified. Their findings found that firearm deaths often involved impulsive action during a state of intoxication. More tellingly they found—

"Self-protection is often cited as a reason for firearm ownership. We found only one"—
only one—

"definite homicide by a civilian killing a fellow among 51 other clearly defined homicides and during the same period as 446 suicides."

The medical research concluded this—

"Parents who keep firearms for reasons of family protection should realise that if their guns ever did kill someone, the most probable victim would be their young adult son dying by his own hand."

Similar statistics, I understand, are available in the United States' experience.

I must say that the situation is no different from that in the rest of Australia. Suicide accounts for the largest number of violent deaths in Australia. For every murder where a firearm is used, there are about six suicides. The rate of suicide by firearm outside of capital cities is almost four times that in capital cities. Part of the emotion behind this Bill is the argument that the presence of a gun in the house will be a deterrent, presumably against violence occurring. It certainly is a misreading of statistics.

Residential locations were the most common locations for murder offences. That is, 66% of all murders occurred in residential locations. The offender was recorded as known to the victim in 54% of all murder offences. In 22% of recorded murders, the offender was a family member. The real dangers in households were for females. Females were more likely than males to be murdered by someone known to them. Offenders were known to female victims in 64% of murder offences and were known to male victims in 49% of offences.

The reason the family home is the source of such violence is the intensity of human relationships, which is the highest there. The prevalence of domestic violence is testimony to this. Reason is swept aside and deeds are done, fortified by alcohol—deeds often times of high emotion and little thought of the consequences. In most domestic violence, it is physical violence with the presence of a firearm where intention becomes murder in the blink of an eye.

The seriousness of the injuries changes with the presence of weapons. Firearms were kept on top of wardrobes and knives in kitchens. The evidence available suggests that wives are usually murdered in their bedrooms and that the few husbands who are victims are murdered in the kitchen. Guns make violence more violent. Most murders, as I said, occur among intimates. The role of firearms is that of an exacerbating factor.

I have deliberately chosen not to dwell on the unfortunate scenes at the high school in Colorado and the two similar incidents since then. The reasons high school students turn guns on their

classmates are highly complex and interwoven with a family with a history of violence, gang membership and substance abuse. However, the risk is amplified with the easy availability of a weapon.

I turn to the macho notion that people woken up from their sleep will easily turn a gun on a would-be intruder. All the evidence suggests that in such a circumstance the offender will overpower the person and use the weapon against them. In more unfortunate circumstances it may well be a family member, possibly even innocently returning earlier than expected from a weekend away, a holiday, a camp or other activity, who finds themselves in a household where there is a gun, subject to the homicide.

But if there are any people so inclined to be macho in weapon use, I draw the attention of the House to the case of the prison officer who took action and shot dead an escaping prisoner. I refer to that high profile incident in Adelaide Street. The officer was so overcome with the psychological and emotional scar of taking a life, even that of a hardened criminal, that, sadly, he took his own life several months later.

I revisit a very moving speech made by the member for Gladstone, who, during her contribution to the debate on Anzac Day trading hours on 11 March 1999, referred to the war contribution of her father. I do not seek to belittle that contribution in any way. Anybody who has had a relative in a war zone certainly knows the sacrifices that family would have made. The member for Gladstone told us that her father never spoke about the atrocities he saw. He spoke about the good times but not the atrocities. That is also my experience when I visit the RSLs. The people who were at the front lines never talk about it. They never talk about those atrocious scenes they had to witness because it is all too painful to remember. If a war scene is too painful to remember, how dreadful must it be to have to think about taking a life in your own home? That is what this Bill invites us to do.

No good can come of this Bill. It has been dressed up by a bunch of fanatics and lunatics to make it look respectable. It quite rightly does not have the support of the Government. Correctly, it does not have the support of the leading Opposition. It has the support of the fringe dwellers, the marginalised, the lunatics, the fanatics. I leave the House to them.
