



Speech by

LINDY NELSON-CARR

MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

Hansard 3 March 1999

HEAD LICE IN SCHOOLS; MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (11.05 p.m.): There is an insidious plague sweeping through the regions—a plague impervious to the usual remedies, a plague that has reached epidemic proportions and affects every primary school child, often on a regular basis. I refer, of course, not to One Nation but to those itchy, fast little suckers, head lice. They do not discriminate and they particularly love clean heads.

The out of control epidemic is the first agenda item to be discussed at P & C meetings, school forums and after-school care. It has hit the media, but still nothing can be done. We are told that any proactive efforts to clean up this epidemic once and for all are fraught with issues: health problems arising from treatment—highly unlikely—consent not exempting Education Queensland from liability, abrogation of parental responsibility and, of course, cost.

If we examine this issue in the real light of day, we are left with the glaringly obvious. The patriarchal system as we know it has always made the decisions. I wonder how many men in this Chamber have been informed that their child has head lice. I wonder how many men in this Chamber have had the frequent, onerous task of delousing, washing, combing and fumigating bed linen and then having to repeat the process a week later because of reinfestation. How many? I was going to say none, and why? Because women have always handled this "dirty" and contagious duty.

Governments have been involved in the papaya fruit fly eradication campaigns, brucellosis eradication and dengue fever eradication.

Mr Fenlon: Leptospirosis.

Ms NELSON-CARR: That one, too. These worthwhile programs have come at a cost of many millions of dollars to community and Government. The crucial two elements in both the papaya fruit fly and brucellosis campaigns were, firstly, a commitment and desire to fix the problem; and, secondly, the funds to do so. Without the commitment to instigate a campaign of eradication and the will of politicians and bureaucrats to institute a successful program, success will not be achieved.

Also, without the necessary finance, neither of these successful campaigns would have achieved their goals. We have to ask ourselves which of these two ingredients we lack which has so far made it impossible for us to tackle in a proactive way the frequent head lice plagues in our schools. There are ways of tackling this serious social problem. It is up to us as community leaders to pursue these avenues in a cohesive and committed manner. We have a national Clean Up Australia Day. A national head lice day must be on the agenda.

I would like to take the opportunity of adding my congratulations to Jim Pearce, the member for Fitzroy, for his display of great loyalty to his electorate and to the many miners and their families. Jim has shown that he represents his constituents without fear or favour and, unlike many of the politicians on the other side of this room, Jim puts core beliefs in supporting the rights of trade unionists in his electorate in front of personal ambition and gain. Jim Pearce is an example of a traditional Labor parliamentarian who acts in accordance with his own principles and core values.

The good citizens of Fitzroy must be proud to have such a fearless and courageous fighter for the working man working for them in Parliament. It should be acknowledged that, while the Opposition benches are awash with graziers and farmers, trade unionists and working-class people are under represented. The fact that Jim Pearce's participation in a peaceful protest resulted in an alleged breach

of the law is unfortunate, but if Jim felt it was necessary to make this statement then honourable members should consider that more of a statement about Peter Reith's industrial relations legislation than about the good member for Fitzroy.

While Gordonstone mine is a considerable geographical distance from my electorate of Mundingburra, the former workers of the Gordonstone colliery can count on my support for as long as their picket line remains peaceful and non-violent. My first-hand experience with the MUA picket line highlighted the hardships these families face. While the spotlight always focuses on dissent rather than the picketers and their families, at the end of the day this is Peter Reith's brave new world where the power of the commissioner has been drastically reduced. I have to say thank God for men like Jim Pearce who have the guts to stand up for social justice for all.
