



Speech by

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE**

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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Hansard 1 December 1999

### PROSTITUTION BILL

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE** (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.30 p.m.): In addressing the Prostitution Bill, I point out that a fundamental measure of the determination of members' response to legislation before the Parliament is: will this Bill make society a better place? Will it bring about improvements to the community and the State of Queensland? It is fair to say that, on both sides of the political divide, there is opposition to this legislation. But on the Government side, that opposition has been stifled. I refer in particular to the reported comments of the Deputy Government Whip, the member for Bulimba—

"Member for Bulimba Pat Purcell said he would vote with the Government to pass the Bill, despite the fact he had spoken against it on previous occasions.

Mr Purcell said he did not believe the bill would make sex workers any safer and would only attract more people into the industry.

'But you vote for the Government when you're in the Government, you don't vote against it,' he said."

Today I issue a challenge to the Premier. I challenge him to allow his members to have a conscience vote on this particular issue, because it is clear that a number of members of the Government are very uncomfortable with the model of prostitution law reform that has been submitted to the Parliament. Just as the member for Bulimba has expressed concerns publicly, I would be surprised if honourable members such as the member for Chermside, the member for Bundaberg and, indeed, the Speaker himself, the member for Redcliffe, were totally happy with all aspects of this legislation. The lesson of recent political history in this State and elsewhere is that people expect their members of Parliament to represent the electorate in the Parliament, not the Government in the electorate. Today I challenge the Premier to allow his members a conscience vote on this particular issue, particularly taking into account that it is common knowledge around the corridors and lobbies that a significant number of Government MPs are uncomfortable with this legislation.

As the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee has reported, this legislation will extend prostitution in Queensland. I am the first to admit that prostitution law reform is never easy. Prostitution is something that Governments around the world have been seeking to deal with for a long, long time. We are yet to see a Government that got it right. I am yet to be convinced that this Government has got it right anywhere. Mr Deputy Speaker, the fact is that the more you expand prostitution, the more ungovernable you make it.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** I have an easy solution for the honourable members who interject. I say to the Minister: give them a conscience vote. If he is so sure of the attitudes of the members for Bulimba, Redcliffe, Chermside and Bundaberg, he should give them a free vote in this place. It would be interesting to see what some of those members would be prepared to do if they were released from the shackles of party discipline on this issue.

This legislation is a quick fix for the electorate of Brisbane Central. It will generate problems in terms of additional prostitution almost everywhere else in the State. Mr Deputy Speaker, I say to the House and the people of Queensland that a Beattie-style boutique brothel is coming to a street near

you. That will be the end result of this legislation. They will be like 7-Eleven stores. They will be springing up all over Queensland. The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee admitted that this legislation will have the impact of expanding prostitution across the State of Queensland.

Let us consider some of the issues. If this Bill is enacted, the safety of participants will not be assured, criminals will not be driven from the industry, more of our most vulnerable young people will not be saved from an unsavoury life and there will be no reduction in AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. There will simply be no positive outcomes if this Bill is enacted. I make it clear that I specifically exclude as a positive outcome a warm inner glow for a few participants at a few politically correct dinner parties around the State. All we will get from this Bill if it is enacted are two industries—the underground industry and the aboveboard industry.

**A Government member** interjected.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** I am glad the Minister has made that interjection, because he seems to have forgotten that he wanted access to the Cabinet records of the previous Government in respect of the review of the existing laws. He said that we did nothing. He was not backward in asking me to break the 30-year rule to provide for him and his Government all the information that had been considered by the previous Government. I was his first port of call. What do we get? We get legislation that will expand the problem. It is legislation that will take boutique brothels and sole operators into every suburb in the City of Brisbane and across the State of Queensland.

The outcome of this legislation will be two versions of the prostitution industry: the underground industry and an aboveboard industry. Both will be run by crooks, and there will be more of them. The history of prostitution through the millennium is that it is of the underground by the underground. Violence against women will continue in the regulated and the unregulated sector. That ugly aspect of prostitution will increase with the increase in the size of the industry that goes with this Bill. If this Bill is enacted, drugs will still be an endemic fact of life. Some of our most vulnerable young people will still be preyed upon by the pimps. In fact, if this Bill is enacted, more will be drawn into the lifestyle. All we will get from this legislation are a more visible form of prostitution and a massive expansion of the industry. The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee makes that particular observation.

All these issues are of particular concern to me as the member for Surfers Paradise. The Gold Coast remains Australia's premier tourist destination. Above everything, it is a family destination built around attracting mum, dad and the kids. The attractions of my electorate for the mums, the dads and the kids of Australia and, increasingly, of countries around the world include the beach, the unique, entertaining and inviting format of the city, the theme parks, the hinterland, the sunshine, the surf and the shopping. However, the fact is that areas such as the CBD of Surfers Paradise will be prime targets for the new expanded Beattie-style prostitution industry that the Parliament is legislating for today.

I do not want to see Surfers Paradise become another Kings Cross, but the reality is that areas such as the CBDs of Surfers Paradise, Cairns and parts of the Sunshine Coast will be prime candidates for the boutique brothels that Premier Beattie is inventing by way of this legislation to take streetwalkers off the streets and roads of the electorate of Brisbane Central. My concern is that the Gold Coast and other tourist areas will be a target for criminals and sleazes—those who will flock to make this industry boom under Mr Beattie's blueprint. They will be made respectable, because the Parliament is saying that it is okay. The Parliament is saying, "We approve this. Today we are legislating for boutique brothels so therefore the doors are open. Come in, invest and open a business in Queensland." I do not want that sort of investment in the CBD of Surfers Paradise. I do not want the CBD of Surfers Paradise to become another Kings Cross. I do not want that to happen to the tourism areas of this State. However, the reality is that the welcome mat is out, courtesy of the honourable member for Brisbane Central.

Obviously, the impact on tourist areas and the character of the tourists who visit could well change as a consequence. I want to see Surfers remain a good, decent family destination. The danger is that, under this legislation, it could become a substantial legal and, therefore, uncontrollable red-light district. Honourable members opposite have said that that will not happen. I refer Government members to a Bundaberg News-Mail article of 10 November 1999. One budding entrepreneur is already seizing the opportunity that this tainted and ineffective legislation presents—this dangerous legislation that will allow prostitution to grow and expand across the State. The article states in part—

"Meanwhile Rockhampton's historic Post Office building would be 'ideal' for a brothel, claims a local businessman who has already contacted Rockhampton City Council to apply for a licence."

The gentleman concerned, who is named— and I will not give him any publicity—intends to apply for 39 brothel licences throughout the State and could employ up to 390 sex workers. We now know what the Premier means when he says "jobs, jobs, jobs". We have one budding brothel entrepreneur who wants to open 39 brothels across the State and employ 390 sex workers. He stated—

"The old Post Office would be a good building to put a brothel in ... It is nowhere near homes and would bring business into the city."

I know that the Minister will claim, "Yes, but we have safeguards in the Bill."

**Mr Barton:** Why don't you read it, you idiot?

**Mr BORBIDGE:** I bet that gentleman has more than 30 friends and I am sure he is happy to finance as many brothels as the law will allow him to. The fact is that the safeguards are woefully inadequate. This Minister will rue the day that he capitulated to his leader, the member for Brisbane Central, in this regard.

**Mr Welford:** Tell the truth for a change.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** I challenge the Minister for Environment to allow the Deputy Government Whip, Pat Purcell, alongside whom he is sitting, to have a conscience vote on this issue so that he can vote the way he wants to instead of being forced to toe the party line.

From a wider perspective, there will not be a single positive outcome from this law anywhere in this State except perhaps in the electorate of Brisbane Central, where it might reduce the number of streetwalkers. I wonder whether that is not what it is all about. Some of the chattering classes opposite will see it as a form of civic enlightenment or as some sort of display of maturity, but they are wrong and they are being quite silly.

I repeat: the underlying facts of this industry are incredibly ugly. It involves the serial abuse and debasement of women and children. It attracts criminals. It is a breeding ground for drug addiction and violence. It is a major source of intravenous and sexually transmitted AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Nothing in this Bill can or will change that. There is no enlightenment in this Bill. There is only a licence for the expansion of an unsavoury industry, which will require an expansion of a range of public services in relation to monitoring. That will largely be a wasted effort, because the problems will still exist not only in the monitored industry after the monitors leave but also in the totally unmonitored industry that will also evolve in large part as a result of this legislation. I would much rather see those very scarce State resources being devoted to ensuring that prostitution, as inevitable as it is and as accessible as it will always remain to those who want it, is not forced on people with the frequency of a corner store. That is what will happen.

**Mr Barton:** Read the Bill.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** The Minister can object all he likes. I simply say this to him: if he is so convinced that his arguments are right and watertight, he should allow his Labor Party colleagues in this place a conscience vote on this issue. If the Government did that, we might find a different result. As it stands at the moment, this legislation will probably be passed on the casting vote of the Speaker. I want to make this observation: if members feel particularly strongly—and I respect the views that have been put on the public record by the member for Bulimba; and I say this for his benefit also—the time comes in politics when we have to take a stand. If Government members are not prepared to give the member for Bulimba a conscience vote, he should stand outside and abstain or come over to our side and vote with his conscience. I say to the member for Bulimba, the member for Redcliffe and the other members I named before, including the member for Bundaberg and the honourable member who is the Government Whip for the time being: if they are really concerned about this Bill, there is no escape after they have voted for it and their name is recorded with the ayes. They will have helped to make it law and they will be held to account come the next election for legislation that does not address the problems of the wider community, legislation that does not make for better law, a better State or a better society, legislation that is totally flawed and legislation that will, by its very nature, expand the amount of prostitution activity in Queensland and all of the problems associated with it.

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