



Speech by

## Hon. R. SCHWARTEN

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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Hansard 25 May 1999

### WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

**Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (10.01 p.m.): I rise to speak in this debate on the Weapons Amendment Bill as I have spoken on every debate about this issue since I have been in this place. I do so as a person who has owned firearms since I have been legally able to do so, and as a person who has participated in competitive shooting in most fields—shotgun, hand gun, pistol shooting, bench rest, full bore rifle shooting, small bore—the whole lot.

I have an enormous respect for firearms but I do not have a fear of them. Accordingly, I have never ever opposed efforts made by Governments from both sides of the political fence to regulate the people who own firearms. Before we came into Government in 1989 it always troubled me that one could buy a very cheap—I think the brand name was Sterling—pump action or semi-automatic shotgun in K Mart, carry out as much ammunition as one liked, and shoot everybody in sight. Anyone who thinks that that is a reasonable society in which to live—a society where we can see a very powerful weapon and its ammunition alongside the cornflakes— should assess where they are in this world.

At that time I steadfastly said that there was a need for regulation. I have maintained that position and I will do so while there is breath in my lungs. When the Labor Party was in Government we were opposed by people who said that there was no need for such legislation. We were told that there was no need to regulate the use of firearms because it was everyone's right to own a firearm.

Curiously enough, nobody suggests to me that everyone ought to have the right to connect their own electricity. No-one suggests to me that everyone should have the right to drive a motor car on whatever side of the road they like, free of any inhibition with regard to age or infirmity. No-one has suggested to me that there ought to be no licensing or registration of motor vehicles. That has never been suggested to me, even by those people huddled up in the corner there like motherless kittens. Those people are not even suggesting that a dangerous item such as a motor vehicle ought to be in the grasp of anyone who chooses to use it for self-defence. No-one has suggested to me that we ought to be able to wire up our front door in case some unpleasant person comes a-knocking. I do not hear those opposite saying that that should be a line of self-defence. I do not hear anyone saying that one should be able to run a line of No. 6 wire across the front yard and connect it up to the mains as self-protection or as self-defence.

**Mr Lucas:** They thought it was.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** Perhaps they have one. Perhaps all the unlicensed electricians belong to One Nation. On election day last year a person whom I know in the shooting fraternity in Rockhampton was handing out how-to-vote cards for One Nation at the Rockhampton North State High School. He said, "I am only doing this, mate, because you are going to take our guns off us." I said, "What is your problem?" He said, "Well, I couldn't get a licence for a gun." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, I didn't want to apply." I said, "Why?" He said, "I think it's my right to have one." I said, "That's a bit of a pity. What do you want one for?" He said, "For self-defence." I said, "You have been a member of gun clubs and so on. You could have got a licence." He said, "I want one so that if somebody comes into my house that I don't want, I can shoot them." He was staring me in the eyes when he said that. I said, "Listen, mate, I have been around firearms all my life and I have pursued sporting interests with them, but the thought of turning a firearm on another human being has never ever crossed my mind."

Let me tell honourable members that my father, who spent six years defending this country in the famous 9th Division, will not have a firearm in the house because he knows what they can do. I have never thought that a firearm was in my home for that reason. I said to this gentleman, "Look, my great hope is that, if someone got into my house and stole my video recorder, myself, my wife and my two children would sleep through it." He said, "You're mad. I'd want to get out and shoot that B for taking that." I said, "I don't think any human life is worth 500 bucks for a video that is insured." That is where I differ from the people who are supporting this legislation.

**Mr Lucas:** What happens when their kids pick up the rifle and shoot one of their siblings?

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I can tell the honourable member of an instance like that. A very good friend of mine has been a quadriplegic since the age of nine because his brother picked up a .22 rifle that was sitting on the stump caps under the house. There was a cartridge in the rifle. The rifle had been in that position for many years and the boys were playing cowboys and indians. The rifle was taken from under the house and one boy shot his brother in the back. That boy has been a quadriplegic for 37 years. Guess where his brother is? He is in the cemetery because he committed suicide as a result of that.

Firearms bring a lot of pleasure. I have won a lot of championships with firearms. I have a great collection of firearms. However, let me say that the thought of anyone walking in and getting a firearm simply on the basis of defending themselves is abhorrent to me. What sort of society do the One Nation members of this House want to live in? Do they want to live in a society where the gun is the aim in life and everyone must have a gun? Is that the measure of our society?

My mother would not know one end of a gun from the other. Does she have to have a gun? After the last debate in this House I had elderly ladies ringing me up and saying, "You're taking away our right to self-defence." I said, "Have you ever fired a firearm?" I was told, "No, but I would like to have one." I said, "What would you do with it?" They said, "Well, I never really thought about that but it would be nice to have one, just in case." Perish the thought! The person who broke into the house would take the firearm from the woman and shoot her. That is the reality.

Tonight, I ask the members of One Nation and those other members who advocate this law—every single one of them—to stand up here tonight, particularly Mr Feldman, and answer yes or no: do they favour a referendum of every person in Queensland on the issue of guns and on what they are putting up tonight? Do you?

**One Nation members:** Yes.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I now have that on the record.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Nelson-Carr): Would the Minister call the member by his correct title.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** The member for Caboolture and other members of One Nation have just stated that they want a referendum in Queensland on everybody having the right to own guns. Let me tell them that I do not. In my electorate, 14% of the people own registered firearms. Say another 10% of the people own unregistered firearms, which makes 24% of the people in my electorate owning firearms. That is less than one quarter of the people in my electorate owning firearms. So I tell the members of One Nation to go ahead with their proposal for a referendum, because unlike some members of One Nation, I will obey the law and hand in my gun.

The reality is that the majority of Queenslanders do not want anybody to have a firearm. That is the reason why the previous Government did not want to go down the path of having a national referendum. One Nation is big on talking about people having the right to have their say. They should find out what Australians really, really want in relation to gun reform. The people do not want guns at all. They do not even believe that the farming constituents of National Party members should have them. If One Nation asked the people of Melbourne, they would find out that those people do not want guns at all. The One Nation members should propose to hold a referendum—and I will support it—that everybody in Queensland has the right to own a firearm, or hold a referendum along the lines that John Howard was going to hold, which was that the Commonwealth have the right to make laws pertaining to guns, and see how the people vote.

The reality is that this Bill is a cheap shot. One Nation has done the decent, gun-owning fraternity a great disservice by introducing this Bill. It has said to the people in the gun fraternity with whom I knock around that their hobby—their sport—is about shooting people. The Leader of One Nation has said that we need guns in our households.

**Mr Feldman:** You said it.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** It frightens me that, as an ex-police officer, the member even had a gun—or Mr Paff. He could not tell the truth unless by accident, and he had a gun as well.

**Mr Lucas:** I hope he doesn't shoot as straight as he tells his stories.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I take that interjection. Perhaps it was just a bit of bunkum, really. The reality is that, tonight, One Nation stands exposed on this issue. It is all very well for One Nation members to squawk and go on about this issue, but the reality is that they do not represent mainstream Queenslanders, who understand the need to licence people who have firearms. When cars became a problem in society, we developed a system of licensing. When plumbing people started connecting the mains of the sewerage to the sink, which started to cause problems, we needed to licence plumbers. I dare say that if we went back 50 years or 60 years when car licensing and car registration was introduced, people said that that would be the end of society as they knew it. The reality is that such licensing has not hindered society.

I am all for people pursuing their sporting interests in a sensible way, but we should bear in mind that we are dealing with very, very, very dangerous objects that could fall into the wrong hands. One Nation wants to put them, with no scrutiny whatsoever, in the hands of untrained, unqualified people who may have them for all the wrong reasons in the world.

I am qualified to hold various firearm licences in Queensland. I am quite happy to put my record next to the record of the Leader of One Nation any day he likes, and probably my shooting accuracy as well. I have been down to the Police Academy and I have seen the ceiling strafed with bullets. They tell me that the Leader of One Nation was the one who did the shooting practice.

**Mr FELDMAN:** I rise to a point of order. I take offence to that comment and I would like it withdrawn.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member wants it withdrawn.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I am so sorry that it upset the one-time hero of One Nation. I withdraw. The reality is that I do not want to take up any more time on this very, very valuable issue. I think that the contributions that have been made by the sensible members of this Parliament will speak for themselves, and speak volumes. Let me say that tonight One Nation has done the shooting fraternity of this State a great disservice by its despicable and disgraceful actions.

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