



Speech by

**SHAUN NELSON**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

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### **STOLEN GENERATION**

**Mr NELSON** (Tablelands—IND) (3.46 p.m.): Can anyone name the person who stood at Meewa and defended this land, the true owners of which have been acknowledged by members of this House? Can anyone name that person? I can. His name was Multuggerah. Another great Aboriginal person, whom I will not name because he has passed on, is now at Chalawong with Multuggerah. He would be looking down today. He is a man whom I knew personally and who has written the foreword to my father's book. I am sorry to say that he would not be very happy with what is happening here today. He would not be very happy at all!

This has all been said here already today, but will this apology provide one single job? Will this apology seal any roads in my electorate? Will this apology combat alcoholism and substance abuse? Will this apology improve anyone's current living standards? We have already heard the answer to that—no. The member for Cook admitted that.

A few weeks ago, I stood in this House and said that no-one should claim moral superiority over Anzac Day. I said that no-one should accuse anyone of not being proud of Anzac Day. I am horrified and disgusted that members of the Australian Labor Party—members whom I defended that night—would accuse me in this place of not feeling genuine hurt for what happened to people who have been oppressed or destroyed. I cannot believe that those opposite would say that of anyone.

When they say that, members opposite are simply playing politics. They stand up and piously preach that they want to take the politics out of this matter, but then they accuse other people of having no heart. I cleared Chalawong with my own hands. I went there and helped pull the weeds away to expose something that for years had been covered in dust from a quarry. I stood there with that man. I listened to the stories about Multuggerah.

The member for Cook told this House that there are more indigenous people in his electorate than in any other in this State. My electorate would come second. The member for Brisbane Central comes from Atherton. He knows that this is a fact. I speak to Aborigines, such as Terry Murray, in my electorate. Every time I return to my electorate and tell him about the things said in this Parliament and the laws that are passed here he spits and curses and says, "When are they actually going to do something? I don't want your filthy apology."

Red Cloud, an American Indian, said it quite plainly when troops led by Custer went into the Black Hills and took his land away from him. Apologies meant nothing to him. Those apologies were worthless because his people had been destroyed. The apologies could not bring one person back. The apologies could not help him one iota.

Those opposite know it—they damned well know it. It is a disgrace that we should be even debating this matter. I say to the Aboriginal people who are listening to this debate, "You are being had. You are being led. In the 20 years since you gained the vote what has the Labor Party done for you?" I went to Aboriginal communities such as Yarrabah and I said to the people, "Why do you vote for the ALP? Have they delivered for you?"

The Minister for Aboriginal Policy has the hide to say to me that there is no such thing as alcohol abuse in my electorate. I am told that there is no such thing as children suffering from substance and alcohol abuse. The Minister knows that what I say is the truth but fails to do anything

about it. The Minister has failed miserably to do anything about it. I know that members of the Minister's staff support my statement. The simple fact is that it is true. The day after I made that statement, Aboriginal people came to me and thanked me for highlighting it. They asked me to help them because no-one else will. If 28% of my electorate is Aboriginal, they damned well did not vote Labor, that is for sure, and they never will because they have grown up, they have learned and they know that Labor will not help them. Labor cannot. It has failed miserably and the members opposite know it. I say to the Aboriginal people: do not be had any more.

I am sure that all members know who Malcolm X is. He said quite plainly, "Watch out for the foxes—people who call themselves Liberals, but do nothing to prove it—they are the greatest danger." He said that they are the most dangerous people in society. We all know who the foxes are in this Parliament today. The Aboriginal people in my electorate know where they stand with me. They know that I will be honest with them.

**Ms Spence:** They won't vote for you.

**Mr NELSON:** I do not ask them to vote for me. I ask them to judge what happens. Yes, the reality is that it is very likely that I will not be re-elected. The simple fact is that I probably will not be re-elected because Labor will direct preferences against me. So be it. However, I echo the words of J. F. Kennedy when I say, "If you make peaceful protest impossible, you make violent protest inevitable." It is as simple as that.

**Mr Schwarten:** You aren't quoting John F. Kennedy.

**Mr NELSON:** That is exactly what he said. I expect a little bit more from the member for Rockhampton. At least he represents a regional community, unlike the others who live here in fortress Brisbane and preach from the protection of the walls that are provided for kilometres around this community and that buffer them from the society in which I live. How many Aboriginal halfway houses are there in the street in which the member for Brisbane Central lives? I know the street in which he lives. None! Zero! How many Aboriginal halfway houses are in the street where the member for Mount Gravatt lives? Zero! I can take members to a place in Mareeba where there are six Aboriginal houses in one line. The people in my community have actually provided me with a petition to get something done about the trouble that is there. That is a petition from a group in the community who have had enough. Again, the members opposite would not understand.

However, the biggest thing is that I do not expect the ALP to understand. They are representing their natural constituency. So it is probably even wrong of me to abuse them for doing so. I admit that they have every right in the world to come into this place and represent the attitudes that they represent. That is fair enough. The reality is that I may not be re-elected to this House. However, I am sincerely heartened that the coalition has shown some strength of character and some determination. The speech given by the Leader of the Opposition on this issue made me believe that there is a glimmer of hope for my society.

**Mr Pitt:** You won't get National Party preselection, either.

**Mr NELSON:** I can assure the member that I do not want National Party preselection. The member for Mulgrave knows that I do not want National Party preselection. I destroyed a National Party Minister, and quite rightly so. He deserved every inch of it.

The simple fact is that I am heartened that maybe—just maybe—a message is being heard by people in the Opposition and that some day in the future I will not have to pick up a gun and defend my rights. Let me tell members right now that members of this Chamber should be counting themselves lucky that I am in this place speaking, because guess what—

**Government members:** Ha, ha!

**Mr NELSON:** I am glad the members laugh, because guess what? I am probably the most moderate person I know in my electorate who feels the same way I do. I actually limit what I say.

**Mr Schwarten:** I know people who live in your electorate who don't sound anything like you.

**Mr NELSON:** I admit that there are a few Labor Party voters in my electorate. Some of them have actually come up to me at the DNR protest and shown me their Labor Party cards and said, "We are card-holding members of the Labor Party and we do not agree with what is going on." So yes, there are Labor Party voters in my electorate. They are entitled to their views. If they elect a Labor Party member for Tablelands, they will get their voice heard. However, whether members opposite like it or not—and I know that they do not—I am the member for Tablelands and the simple fact is that I will represent the people who put me here.

I must say that the thought police and political correctness do not scare me, but I damn well hope I scare them and that I scare every social engineer. The fact that the ALP disagrees vehemently with what I say means that I am right. The more members opposite laugh and so on proves to me that what I am trying to present in this debate and in other debates is right. I represent the opposite opinion

to their opinion and, as I have said before, in a free and democratic society that is my right, and that is what I was elected to do. I was elected to reject totally the policies of the ALP, and I am doing that. In saying that I must admit that, after sitting in this Parliament, there have been times when I have agreed with the ALP. This is not one of them.

When I began my speech, I asked for a recognition that the ALP does not have the moral superiority in this matter. Doctor King had a dream, a world in which his children would live where they would be judged on the content of their character and not the colour of their skin. That is a world in which I would like to live. As I said before, I am told that 28% of the people who live in my electorate are of indigenous ancestry. I have lived in rural communities for most of my short life. During that short period, I have interacted with many Aborigines. I have met good and bad whites and I have met good and bad blacks. I have never and would never consider somebody's colour as a way of judging their personality. I take all people on the contents of their character and I judge their need according to the level of that need, not their ancestry. In this country, we judge people by who they are, not by who their father was. What interaction do those members who live in fortress Brisbane have with Aboriginal people? None!

The representation that I am bringing into this House tonight is of the people who live in my electorate and in other electorates throughout the State, the people who live in Cook at Shelburne Station, and the many, many white people in the electorate of Cook who are not represented. I have wondered why the ALP has never preselected an Aboriginal person for the electorate, but I am left to wonder. The simple fact is that I am representing the people who disagree with the Labor Party, who disagree with this apology. In most cases, they are asking for a simple recognition of the fact that we can agree to disagree. After all, we have to live on this island together. We are stuck here. My ancestors did not ask to come here. They did not line up at the wharf and say, "Please, chain me to the bottom of a convict ship; I feel like a 30,000-odd kilometre trip to the other side of the planet to till soil for the English Government."

At one stage of my life when I was in Canberra I talked to members of the British High Commission. I asked them what would be my chances of receiving an apology from the Queen or from the British Government. I was told quite shortly and sweetly that that was impossible. However, I tell members that, under some false idea of penal colonial settlement, my ancestors were enslaved, chained to the bottom of a ship and sent against their will to this country—a country which they saw as a hell and from which they had very little chance of escaping and virtually no chance of surviving to again see their mother country. But am I bitter? Am I angry? If wanted to, I could join my relatives who still live in Ireland and be very angry and bitter at the British Government. I could do everything I could to try to bring about the downfall of the British Government and its people. But what point would there be in maintaining a rage against a Government that has no intention of ever apologising and, even if it did apologise, has no intention of being sincere about it? I was taught the simple fact that history is closed to us. We cannot understand it, we cannot interpret it; we can only look at history and, say, "Yes, we agree", or, "We disagree with that."

Personally, if today there was a Bill brought before this House that provided that we should forcibly remove Aboriginal children from their parents, I would vote against it. If the coalition introduced such a Bill, I would vote with Labor. If Labor introduced such a Bill, I would vote with the coalition. It is as simple as that. I would not support it, nor would anyone else. The simple fact is that such a Bill would not be introduced, because these days no-one would be silly enough to do that.

As a 26 year old man—forget the fact that I am a member of Parliament—on behalf of myself, my generation and generations that will come after me, I ask: why is the Government introducing sorry books for teenagers in high schools which will institute the whole concept of guilt into society? I want to be part of an Australia that is proud of its heritage and its past, and can move into the future as one. You do not want equality. You talk about it and you pay lip service to it, but all you come up with are these hollow apologies. You are not apologising to the stolen generation.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! I remind the honourable member to speak through the Chair.

**Mr NELSON:** The ALP is apologising for its lack of ability to help. It is saying to the Aboriginal people, "We are sorry that we cannot help you. We are sorry that in 20 years' time you will be in the same situation that you are in today." I have grown up watching people such as Gough Whitlam wandering around Aboriginal camps saying, "This is a terrible thing. Look at the terrible situation they are in." I grew up watching that. Today I watch people such as the Minister go to Aboriginal communities and say, "It is such a terrible thing that these people are living in abject poverty." I guarantee that in 40 or 50 years' time when I am speaking in condolence motions for many people in the House today, I will be saying exactly the same thing. I can guarantee that when I am in my 70s it will be exactly the same.

The ultimate tragedy that we have to look at is the fact that the answers are not going to come from some hollow and false apology. The answers are not going to rain down on us because we have seen the error of somebody else's ways. I can tell the House that if I knew for one minute that saying sorry would bring back the stolen generation's links with their past, if I knew for one minute that it would help combat alcoholism and substance abuse, if I knew for even one minute——

**Ms Boyle:** It will.

**Mr NELSON:** That is rubbish, and the member for Cairns, of all people in the House, should know it. If I knew even for a moment that it would do any of those things, one would have to hold me down to stop me apologising. My speech would be exactly the opposite to this. I would go out of my way to do everything. The simple fact is that no apology from me will make a difference. This motion could be passed unanimously and it would prove nothing. As I said before, after National Sorry Day there will be no national forgiveness day. There will be no moving forward. It will continue to divide the community, and people who are less tolerant than I am will get angrier.

As I did at the start of my speech, I echo the words of John F. Kennedy—words that Martin Luther King repeated: if you stop peaceful protest, if you make peaceful protest impossible, you make violent protest inevitable. If I say nothing else for the next two years that I am in this place, I beg the Parliament to hear those words. Although I do not consider myself to be prophetic at all, if members do not listen and learn from the mistakes of the past—mistakes that they are now making—they will ride the whirlwind.

The member for the Tablelands states in this place that the Tablelands does not apologise. The Tablelands will not apologise. The Tablelands feels genuine sadness, which is greatly different from what is being expressed here tonight. I am sad that any society could do wrong to anyone else. Personally, I have never hurt anyone and I would never hurt anyone, and I am sad that anyone else would. Throughout history, no-one can lay claim to standing solitary on the hill of despair when it comes to having communities raped and pillaged from beneath them. I do not think anyone knows that more than the Irish, who are rightfully or wrongfully called the "blacks of Europe". The simple fact is that as the member for Tablelands, I do not apologise because I do not want to continue to divide my community.

I say to the Premier: if he wants to divide my community, he can get the hell out and leave the Tablelands alone. We do not need him any more. We do not want him forcing his way of life onto us. He should stay here in fortress Brisbane. He left the Tablelands long ago, so he should leave us alone. We can get on quite well without him. When the decision of the Parliament is made public tonight, I want everyone to know that the Tablelands will solve its own problems and we will get along like the community that we are. We will fight through Government oppression and destruction by departments like the DNR. We will live and we will continue to prosper and we will not die. We will not go away, because nothing that is said or done in the Parliament can ever crush the spirit of the Tablelands.

The Tablelands is a united community and it will not get any better because of the apology that will be forced on the Parliament tonight. I say to members opposite: look to the future and do something, and then they will gain my respect. Until then, to me they are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites.

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