



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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MANDATORY SENTENCING

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (7.15 p.m.): I take this opportunity to speak about mandatory sentencing. I do not wish to look at this issue merely from the point of view that I agree with it wholeheartedly; rather, I wish to look at the issue in the context of the rights of States and Territories. Last night the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Denis Burke, and a few non-descripts, in particular Senator Bob Brown, appeared on the Lateline program. With senators such as Bob Brown running around the traps, my arguments against Federation are quite valid, especially given his performance on Lateline last night. It was absolutely horrific.

Mr Sullivan: Don't you like him?

Mr NELSON: He is an absolute fool, to say the least. Hopefully, the people of Tasmania will realise that.

Mandatory sentencing has been put in place by the Northern Territory Government. It was given a mandate to do so by the people. It was tested at an election. As Denis Burke said last night, 70% were in favour of mandatory sentencing. He also said that they received a few submissions on Saturday—in fact, over 4,000 submissions—for a by-election, 70% of which were in favour of mandatory sentencing in the Northern Territory. He went on to dismiss some of the absolutely ludicrous statements made in the media recently, for example, that there are thousands of juveniles languishing in Northern Territory prisons. As Denis Burke said, there are currently 10 juveniles in Northern Territory prisons and, on average, there are no more than 20 at any one time. I dare say the figures would be much higher in Queensland. The debate went on and on. Denis Burke said—and this is a bit of a reality check for the good senator—that when polled 58% of Tasmanians supported mandatory sentencing. I am sure that if we polled electorates in Queensland and New South Wales we would find that a similar proportion of people favour mandatory sentencing.

I wish to return to the ludicrous statement made by this so-called senator. He said—

"I think about the Aboriginal and other children languishing in Denis Burke's correctional centres tonight, homesick and forlorn, hundreds of kilometres away from their homes, getting no good remedial treatment, probably in many cases unable to understand why they're there and I think we as a nation have to do better than that."

What an absolutely nightmarish statement for a senator to make! The fact is that those people who go to prison under the mandatory sentencing laws have had two chances before they end up with a mandatory sentence. The simple fact is that they are not imprisoned after they mistakenly do something while wandering down the street at night. They are not plucked from their beds in the dead of night by secret police and dragged off to a correctional facility. They are people who, in some cases, commit property offences. What they take is totally and utterly irrelevant. What matters is that they committed a property offence and they are being suitably punished for it. Bleeding hearts and artists in our community have wonderful ideas that we can talk people out of crime, that we should make people feel better and that it is society's fault. What a lot of rubbish!

Last night, the Chief Minister put his foot down. The Federal Government is bullying the Northern Territory, because it can get away with it. It is not gutsy enough to bully a State; it is bullying a Territory, because it can get away with it. I could introduce a Bill into the Parliament to bring in

mandatory sentencing, and I will definitely try to do so. However, more than likely it would not be passed. I hope that one day in this State we have a Government that has the guts to bring in mandatory sentencing and get tough on crime. If we do, it will be supported openly and wholeheartedly by most of the people who live north of the Tropic of Capricorn. I do not know about the southerners, but the simple fact is that most north Queenslanders—and I dare say that, if a poll were conducted, we would be talking about 70% to 80%—would support mandatory sentencing in principle.

As for the issue of racism, it is just totally ludicrous. The Northern Territory has a long history, especially on this issue, of looking after its Aboriginal people in those respects. Most Aboriginal people to whom I talk in the communities of Ravenshoe and so on agree that when a person commits a crime they should be punished for it. Actually, just recently I have been trying to help some Aboriginal people get somebody punished for a crime who was let off by the bleeding hearts and artists.

I would like to say to Chief Minister Denis Burke, "Good on you. Keep up the fight. There are plenty of north Queenslanders and other people who support you. Don't back down to the Federal Government. Hopefully, one day we will go back to pre-Federation times and we will not have a Federal Government that can go around bullying and destroying States' rights the way that this one does."
