



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 20 June 2001

PROSTITUTION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (8.51 p.m.): I gives me great pleasure to rise in support of the Prostitution Amendment Bill, which was introduced into the House by the Leader of the Opposition. However, I find it unpalatable that not only must we defend the rights of councils with a population of more than 25,000 people to have their say on laws passed in this House which affect them but also we have to acknowledge once again the fact that this government favours prostitution as an alternative lifestyle for our young people.

Although there are no towns with a population of that magnitude within my electorate—and therefore we do have the right to refuse the setting up of brothels—it is only fair and just to fight for the same right for other communities which have a population of more than 25,000. Yes, those communities are big enough to stand up for themselves, but in this case the Queensland government will not allow it. This government is being discriminatory—not on the basis of race, colour, age or religion; this government discriminates on the basis of a town's population. It is a disgrace to discriminate on any level, or so we are constantly told, but this hypocritical government is doing that very thing.

I ask this government to accept this amendment bill introduced by the opposition because to not support it is to impinge upon the rights of local government to govern its own community as directed by its own community members. The Beattie government is overriding their free will—not for the sake of law, but simply to impose the government's will. It is overriding a community's will to protect itself and its individual members from what is deemed by some to be an undesirable establishment. If members of this government wish to go to brothels, then by all means they can go. However, they should not drag the rest of the community with them and they should not expose any of our young people to them. Just because work or lifestyles dictate where a family must live, that is no reason to penalise people for living in a particular town. Does this government have the right to evict people from a town because that particular town is a little bigger than others? That is exactly what the government is proposing to do if people do not wish to live in a town with brothels. It is pushing values onto people. It is discriminating against a moral family lifestyle in favour of people who choose what many call an immoral lifestyle.

This government might not see it that way, but in any democracy we have the right to say yea or nay to moral issues. It is a community's right to fight in the very best interests of everyone. No government should have the right to dismiss out of hand the concerns of the people. Every community is different. Every shire is different. Each of us here represents differing opinions as reflected by the people we represent. Those opposite may not agree, but that does not make them right. Yes, they may very well have the numbers in this House, but that does not make them right either. Numbers in the parliament do not give any government the right to relinquish their obligation to govern morally. Party solidarity does not give them that right, either.

This government obviously believes that legalising brothels is okay, and nobody is arguing that fact tonight. If that is the case, let all communities have the right to agree or not agree as those communities see fit. If this government is so sure of itself and of its future direction on moral issues, let us put it to the test. Let the communities be allowed to make their own judgment, not constrained by law. What is there to be afraid of? If the government is right, people will flock to it with applications and councils will be fighting over themselves to set up brothels. If it is wrong—well, let us just put it to the test.

Article 6 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which was signed in Australia in 1981, states—

... prostitution, even when willingly engaged in by a prostitute, is a violation of human rights of all women. It is a predatory, exploitative vice, which preys on the vulnerability of others with serious social consequences.

If a local government wishes to uphold such a moral UN convention, if a local government values its community members above all else, if a local government is elected by the people to do the right thing by those people and if a local government values its men and women very highly, what right has this government to tell those men and women, girls and boys, that they are not worthy of being morally protected because they live in a town with a population of more than 25,000?

This is not a bill about the previous bill passed in this House. This is a bill about the right of choice of one community and the lack of that right of choice of another community simply because of the difference in the number of people living in those communities. No-one is arguing about the toughness of the previous legislation. This bill is purely and simply about what most of us aspire to—equality for all.
