



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

---

Hansard 30 May 2001

### **RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS OFFENCES BILL**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (11.23 p.m.): I am gratified to have a chance to make a contribution to the debate on this important piece of legislation. I need to place on record my regret at the frivolous way this piece of legislation has been treated by the government, both in the way that it has been brought on for debate at this late hour and the way that ministers and government backbenchers have conducted themselves during the debate thus far. They have brought no credit to themselves. They have treated this legislation as some sort of a joke, and it is not a joke. It is an important piece of legislation. It is a genuine attempt by the member for Southern Downs to address what is a very important issue to everyone in the House.

I say to the members of the government that, if those tearful hand-on-the-heart speeches that we heard earlier on in this parliament meant anything, they would be giving this piece of legislation some real consideration. Instead they come into the House at this late hour of the night, bring it on for debate without any warning and break all the conventions. What did they really expect us to do? Pack up and go home! Did they really expect that we would do that? If they did, they were dead wrong. We will be here to debate this piece of legislation and any other piece of legislation for as long as they like and whenever they like. They cannot hide from these issues by adopting these types of childish, stupid tactics.

This is an important piece of legislation. It sets out to address the problem of racial and religious vilification. None of us supports that. Most people in this society, including every person in this parliament and most people in the electorates that we represent, would agree that racial and religious vilification needs to be addressed by us as law-makers. It also needs to be addressed by society as a whole. Irrespective of the laws that we make here, the most powerful pressure that is brought to bear on people is peer pressure, in other words, what is considered acceptable in society. We can never legislate fully to replace that feeling of what is acceptable in a society, what is an appropriate course of action and what is socially acceptable and what is not. This piece of legislation goes some of the way towards providing a legislative base for an approach to the problem of racial and religious vilification. It makes that type of vilification an aggravating circumstance when a crime has been committed with that as a motivation.

I want to say some things in reply to the contribution made by the Attorney-General earlier in this debate. That contribution should not be taken seriously. Here is a man who has no credibility in the parliament at all. He was an absolute failure in his previous portfolio. He earned the wrath and the anger of every person who had an interest in the area that he was charged with administering. Every such person was left with a very poor opinion of his administration.

He has been Attorney-General for only a short time. There is no way that he has established enough credibility for government members to base their opposition to this legislation on this man's contribution to the parliament. Let us look at the substance of the contribution. What bureaucratic gobbledegook! I wonder who wrote that for the Attorney-General. He sits over there like an overgrown, giggling schoolgirl. That is the type of approach that he adopted with a range of legislation in the previous parliament. Here we see the same approach.

There is no credibility in anything that the Attorney-General says to this parliament. There is certainly no credibility in his address to the parliament tonight. He did nothing to enhance his already

badly tarnished reputation. He did nothing to suggest that his success as an Attorney-General is going to be any better than his lack of success as the Minister for Natural Resources, and we all remember that. He can be assured that every time I stand in this parliament I will continue to remind him of the baggage that he carries. The people of rural and regional Queensland will never forget his administration of that portfolio. We will be watching with eagerness to judge his performance in his new portfolio. I suggest it will probably be of the same standard.

To return to the substance of this legislation, this is a sensible alternative to the attempt that the government made today to amend the Anti-Discrimination Act with its Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill. That was the government's approach to this problem. It was a heavy-handed and over-the-top approach. Because it was forced through this parliament by the bloated numbers on the government benches, that approach has created a whole range of grey areas that are unnecessary. The legislation that we are debating now, moved by the member for Southern Downs, is a much better alternative, a much better way of approaching the problem. We need to take this legislation—

**Mr Purcell:** And throw it out!

**Mr SEENEY:** We need to take this legislation hand in hand with the social and peer pressure I spoke of earlier, and I do not expect the member for Bulimba to understand that. He understands a different sort of pressure: he understands the BLF type of pressure. I understand that sort of pressure too, old mate, but we both have to agree that it is outdated. It is a long way out of date. We have to start looking at other ways of identifying and addressing certain issues within our community, and racial and religious vilification is certainly one of those issues.

This legislation is a sensible alternative to the legislation that was forced through this parliament this afternoon. It preserves the freedom of speech that so many Australians hold so dear. That is part of the Australian psyche. It is part of the Australian character.

**Mr Bredhauer:** It preserves your freedom of speech and your right to speak freely.

**Mr SEENEY:** It is part of the character of the Minister for Transport, just as it is part of my character. We should value and protect that. Those opposite say things that I find offensive at times. In fact, most members on the other side say things that I find offensive at different times. But I will defend their right to say them, just as I will defend my right to stand up here and attack them, because that is the concept of freedom of speech that we believe was so callously attacked by the Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill that the government forced through this place this afternoon.

In relation to all the things said by the tearful backbenchers opposite who were sent in here with written speeches and crocodile tears streaming down their faces, no-one disagrees that all of those things need to be addressed. They need to be addressed urgently, but they need to be addressed within the confines of what is acceptable to most Australians. They need to be addressed in a way that preserves the freedom of speech that we all hold so dear, and it is important that we recognise that. It is important that we do not lose sight of the importance of freedom of speech when we try to address these very real issues.

That is what this legislation is about. It is a good alternative way to address an issue that we all agree needs addressing. I urge all members of the government to take off their blinkers and look at this legislation for what it is. They should not take any notice of the nonsense that the members opposite sitting at the front of the chamber have peddled. I urge them to support this legislation. It is deserving of their support, because it is a genuine piece of legislation introduced into this House by the member for Southern Downs. It deserves support.

Time expired.

---