



Speech by

**RONAN LEE**

**MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY**

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Hansard 30 May 2001

**ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr LEE** (Indooroopilly—ALP) (4 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to rise in support of the Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill. As may have been the case in other electorates, I begin by acknowledging the fact that a number of people in my electorate have approached me and my office to express their support for this bill. Many of these people come from various local religious groups, whether they be Christian or Jewish. I also spoke with a number of multicultural groups, including Irish people, I am happy to say. Their main sentiment was the fact that racial issues in the electorate arose following the suggestive comments by Pauline Hanson and members of the One Nation Party. Constituents in the Indooroopilly electorate became particularly concerned when Mrs Hanson made these comments, because it became fairly apparent that her statements advocated that it was all right to belittle people on the basis of race, ethnicity, whether people were migrants, where they had come from, what they believed, whether they were religious or not religious, et cetera.

In 1999 this issue came to a head in the suburb of Sherwood when a number of stickers—and I am certain they were similar to the stickers that the member for Gladstone found in her electorate—advocating all sorts of unpleasant things towards migrants, Asians and various other ethnic groups appeared. It is interesting to note that these messages, which were clearly messages of hate, were hidden behind another message. Other stickers appeared at the same time saying 'Jobs, not imports'. What upset me and many people in Sherwood, Graceville and various other places was the fact that a pure message of ethnic hate was wrapped up in what, for all intents and purposes, seemed to be some sort of 'Buy Australian' campaign, which was bizarre. It is atrocious that these people would hide behind the community's fears about unfettered globalisation. I am very proud that this Labor government is taking such a sensible approach to dealing with the realities of globalisation in the economic arena. We were very upset that these people were hiding behind community fears and sought to denigrate those who spoke differently, worshipped in a different place or who looked different. It is for those reasons that so many people in my electorate were so keen to support a bill of this kind.

I will not repeat word for word what was printed on some of the more unpleasant posters and stickers, because I am one of those people who believes that the more these things are repeated the more credibility they gain. But I was moved to speak in support of this bill as a result. Rather than getting bogged down in the intricacies of what clauses 1, 2 or 3 of the bill mean, the most important aspect of this bill is that it makes a very clear statement that this kind of hatred, racism and vilification is absolutely and totally unacceptable in a multicultural society like the one in which we live. The bill also follows a number of recent incidents that other members have mentioned today in the debate. They spoke of vandalism of various offices of Aboriginal groups and also spoke of the defacing of a Brisbane synagogue. I am sure that is why members of the Brisbane Jewish community approached my office and urged me very strongly to support this bill.

I want to make a few important points as they relate to my electorate. The first is that I am very proud that the bill deals with messages spread through the Internet. Many people have concerns that in the 21st century the Internet will become the new home for hatred. Because I represent an electorate where the vast majority of constituents have access to the Internet—the electorate is the home of a major university and many professional people who regularly email my office with messages, so I assume a large proportion of them have access to the Net—I am pleased to say that this bill addresses some of the concerns I have about messages of hate being spread on the Internet. However, it is disappointing that a number of One Nation members are not in the chamber. I know they

are very concerned about the issue of globalisation. I am disappointed that they cannot be here to support a bill that works to limit the globalisation of hatred and the globalisation of vilification. It is disappointing for me that they are not in the chamber to support a bill that goes some way towards limiting the globalisation of hatred and fear.

It is also important to mention that the bill includes issues relating to graffiti and posters, and again I am very happy about that. As someone who was born and grew up 15 miles on the southern side of the border in the Republic of Ireland, I am absolutely overjoyed that the bill includes a provision relating to religious vilification as well. As many honourable members would know, Ireland is a beautiful country which has beautiful lakes and rivers. It is probably the last unspoilt part of the western coast of Europe. The really sad thing is that some of the most beautiful parts of Ireland have been torn apart by what some might describe as a religious dispute and what others would describe as a dispute over issues of republicanism and what not. Whatever the case, to ensure that the sorts of issues that arose in Ireland 800 years ago—they were not addressed then but the people of Ireland are working towards a resolution today—are not repeated here, it is important that Queensland has a legislative framework to ensure that if any of those tensions ever arose in this state we could nip them in the bud to begin with.

I was particularly unimpressed with the comments of the member for Southern Downs when the member for Bulimba was speaking passionately about his Irish heritage. All the member for Southern Downs could whinge about was the number of Irish people in the Queensland police force in the 1940s. My uncle was an Irish policeman in Ireland, not Australia. I have known many Irish policemen in Australia. They are very fine people. I find it absolutely and totally offensive that that would be of concern to anyone. However, as I say, I am overjoyed that this bill includes provisions to deal with religious vilification.

There were a number of other issues raised by previous speakers in the debate which I want to raise, too. Two speakers referred to a number of statements made by the former Archbishop of Melbourne, George Pell. As all members would know, Archbishop Pell, who is now in Sydney, is certainly a man of conviction and many would describe him as a shepherd of his people. The Archbishop's concern with a bill of this sort was his desire as a Christian and as a leader of Christians to be able—and I probably refer to the same article that other honourable members referred to—to preach the gospel. That was his concern. As a Christian, the Christian gospel is not a message of hate. It is not a message of vilification. It is not a message that seeks to turn one group of people against another group of people. The Christian gospel, as I am sure honourable members would be aware, is a message of love, truth, forgiveness and tolerance. I am absolutely flabbergasted that Christian groups feel that this bill will in any way limit their ability to preach and to worship their God in the way that they seek to. That to me seems absolutely and totally bizarre.

**Mrs Reilly:** Because it is not endangered by this bill.

**Mr LEE:** No, Christian groups are in no way endangered by this bill. If there is a group, whether it be a church or some other organisation, that preaches a message of hatred and vilification—whether they say they are Christian or not—based on religion, race, ethnicity, gender or whatever else, then quite frankly that group deserves to be prosecuted, because that is totally unacceptable in a tolerant and multicultural society such as we have. I know that people come to this debate with the best of intentions, but I find it really concerning that some Christian groups feel the way they do. Had Archbishop Pell read the Premier's speech when this bill was introduced he most definitely would have changed his mind.

It is also worth noting that the Victorian Catholic Education Office strongly supported this bill and that in Queensland there has been not a pip—not a noise—out of the Catholic archbishop. If the only apparent opponent we can find to a fantastic bill of this nature is a Victorian religious leader—if we cannot find an opponent in Queensland who leads any sort of significant group of people—then the bill's opponents are really clutching at straws.

In common with a lot of honourable members, I always have grave concerns when people suggest that any legislation would limit freedom of speech. I have no such concerns with this bill. Any legislation that does anything in some way limits personal freedom. We all know that. That is the nature of government. In the short term, personal freedom is always limited when a government legislates. When we decide to tax people, we take the money from people and they lose the freedom to actually spend that money themselves. But in return there is an increase in collective freedom. It is absolutely no good for one group of people to feel that they are 100 per cent free to vilify another group while the second group ends up feeling totally crushed and totally mistreated. We live in a society in which there has to be give and take. This is the sort of bill that works towards maximising the freedom of every member of our community. I commend this bill to the House.

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