



Speech by

STUART COPELAND

MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

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ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (4.13 p.m.): I was not listed to speak to the Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill, but it is one I have been following with interest since it was first introduced into this parliament. Certainly I have followed the debate today, and it is the tone of that debate and some of the inferences of that debate that has urged me to put forward my point of view and the point of view of a lot of people I represent.

We on the opposition side of the House have tried to make this debate a genuine analysis of what this bill will mean within our society. I am unbelievably disappointed that by simply rising to speak against this bill opposition members are labelled as being in some way anti-multicultural, racist or bigoted or as promoting racial vilification. The interjections that have come across the chamber and some of the things that have been said during this debate have carried the very clear implication that anyone who speaks against the bill is racist.

Ms Barry: No-one has said that.

Mr COPELAND: There is a very clear inference. I inferred that even from outside the chamber. The inference that whatever anyone else says is not an acceptable point of view and that it is not acceptable to put that point of view forward simply highlights the dangers inherent in this bill.

The member for Cleveland detailed some of the very sickening things that are available on the Internet. I concur that they are sickening. Some of the stuff available on the Internet is horrible. All of us have had material sent to our electorate offices and have had access to that material and we have all seen the stickers and the posters. It is absolutely sickening, it is disgraceful and we should not in any way condone it—nor do we in any way condone it. Even though we do not condone it, we can quite rightfully still highlight the dangers in this bill and the dangers to freedom of speech, and we should not be ridiculed for highlighting those dangers.

The member for Bulimba highlighted a number of things, including the second reading speech by the Premier, and set out what it is okay to do under this legislation. He said that jokes are okay. He said that Paddy's nights are okay. He said that all sorts of things would be okay, but therein lies another danger. That is, that is his interpretation of what is okay. To someone else, under the same legislation the same behaviour might not be okay at all. The shades of grey that exist within this legislation highlight the very problems that are inherent with it. What might be offensive to one person is not offensive to someone else. And who is going to determine the degree of offensiveness in whatever is said or posted?

The member for Bulimba also highlighted an occasion within a school where some Asian kids were beaten up. Obviously that is horrible. It should not happen and we do not support that happening. If that behaviour is a quantifiable act, under the private member's bill introduced by the member for Southern Downs the perpetrators will be quite severely dealt with. But that is the difference. Here we are talking about a quantifiable act, not someone's interpretation of what another person might have said or done. There has to be a very clear distinction between those two things.

The member for Bulimba also mentioned that the rise of Hansonism has been as a result of this. The rise of Hansonism is due in great part to the very restrictions on freedom of speech that people have had placed on them over the last 10 years. It is a response to political correctness, that people are not allowed to stand up and say what they believe without being ridiculed and howled down, as we have been today for doing exactly that. That is what has given rise to the phenomenon of Hansonism. The idea that this legislation will somehow combat that is unbelievable. In fact, it is in diametrical opposition to that. Introducing this legislation will simply serve to increase that phenomenon.

There are significant freedom of speech concerns with this legislation. I know that a number of government members have said that this bill does not represent a restriction on freedom of speech and that the legislation does not intend to do that. I refer to some of the briefing notes that have been sent out. I am sure that all members have read the passage relating to the New South Wales Equal Opportunity Tribunal drafting its provisions. The notes state—

In any event the right to free expression has never been an absolute or unequivocal right.

Following on from that, it means that the provisions must in some way impinge on freedom of speech. I think that is in itself another very clear danger we should be looking at.

The member for Gladstone made some very salient points during her speech. I have a great deal of respect for the member for Gladstone as a person. She is absolutely committed to doing the right thing, yet the member for Clayfield groaned and put her head in her hands while the member for Gladstone raised some very important points that had been raised with her by people in her electorate.

The sort of ridicule that has been thrown around here is unbelievable. The hypocrisy of it is unbelievable. We in the opposition have the perfect democratic right to stand up and enunciate some of the concerns that we and our constituents have with the legislation—concerns for the very direction of our society. That we should be ridiculed when we try to enunciate those concerns highlights the dangers of giving to some amorphous group of people the right to say, 'Sorry, what you are saying is offensive but what you are saying is not.' That is where the dangers are. That we can be labelled as racist simply for highlighting these problems is incredibly dangerous and incredibly disappointing.

I am absolutely committed to a multicultural society and the benefits that flow from that. I have no qualms about putting that on the public record, and I want to put it on the public record because members of the government have tried to imply that we are against it. We are not. We recognise the benefits gained by having people of all races in our society and country and for them to protect their cultural identity and to contribute to Australia's cultural identity. So let us take that out of the argument. I have said that, I agree with it completely, and I am absolutely dedicated to supporting it. I have no problem with that. Yet I will oppose this legislation.

Mr Lee: Why?

Mr COPELAND: I have just outlined why. If members of the government cannot listen to an alternative point of view, then they need to—

Mr Welford: You haven't put an alternative point of view; all you've done is whinge about us.

Mr COPELAND: The alternative point of view is that freedom of speech and the way in which anyone can be vilified for saying anything—

Mrs Reilly interjected.

Mr COPELAND: I believe that calling us racist incites hatred. I will leave it at that. That is the crux of the problem—that anyone can say anything about anyone and be penalised for it.

Australian society has a very great strength in its freedom of speech, its egalitarian point of view and the equality that we all take for granted. People come to this country to find that. We have fought for it over the years, and we will continue to fight for it. We should not be slurred for putting forward our points of view and expressing our very real concerns about this legislation. We should not be called racist for simply opposing it. We should be commended because we have an alternative point of view, and it is our right to put forward that alternative point of view.
