



Speech by

Hon. K. LINGARD

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

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CHILD ABUSE, ROYAL COMMISSION

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (6.36 p.m.): I certainly support the motion moved by the member for Gladstone in which she calls for a royal commission into failures of the government to adequately provide protection for children. Quite obviously, this is a failure of governments and everyone in this House must admit that governments have failed—and I use the word 'governments'—and therefore a royal commission is necessary. I was disappointed tonight to hear the Premier's comments when he said that a royal commission costs so much and therefore we will not have it because of the cost. That is completely wrong, especially when we are dealing with children and with the fact that successive governments have failed to be able to resolve the problem.

I note the recent July report of *Families News* which carries an article with the heading 'Break the silence for our kid's sake' which mentions Project Axis, which was a joint inquiry. It states that the project's findings are distressing and that child sex offenders are most often known to the victim. It talks about the fact that up to 45 per cent of females and 19 per cent of males may have been victims of sexual abuse. It talks about the fact that half the victims of child sex abuse never report the abuse to another person. Clearly, there are problems; there are still problems even after the Forde inquiry. One of the statements in the Forde inquiry report was that—

Some responsibility must be taken by those to whom the abuses were reported and who did not act.

The Forde inquiry was a commission of inquiry into abuse of children in Queensland institutions. It looked at abuse. It looked at mistreatment and it looked at neglect. Obviously it asked why this happened. It asked how we could repair the damage. It asked how these violations could be prevented from happening again. Every one of us who has had anything to do with the Department of Families knows that this is an ongoing problem and will continue to be an ongoing problem, and we will continually need inquiries and outside inquiries which have the power to report on all of these things, especially how these violations can be prevented from happening again.

That report asked for a \$103 million increase to be provided in the Queensland budget and it had 42 recommendations. It shocked us all and it led to the closure of several institutions that many of us thought were doing an excellent job at the time. I say that because quite obviously we need to change our attitudes and we need to be continually challenged, because what I have noticed from being a minister for families and within the education system is that these departments can become severely bureaucratic and set in their ways. They are extremely hard to change and extremely hard for a minister to change.

Certainly, an outside report such as the Forde report is able to take that significant step. Some people used the inquiry at that time to be vindictive by implying that something occurred when it did not. I feel sorry for some of the institutions that were forced to change; some of the reports were never checked. Some people had their reputations destroyed. However, we still have to have this if we are to overcome the problem of child abuse.

Unfortunately, organisations and departments such as the Department of Families become very set in their ways. We find front-line workers involved in looking into very demanding complaints. We need very experienced people. These people must have an education, experience and an ability to deal with people. However, the problem of day-to-day, hour-to-hour demands on a front-line worker are massive. People who perform in an excellent manner generally are upwardly mobile and find it a welcome relief to go to a higher-level job. Workers obviously need an increasing salary, job satisfaction

and less pressure. In a demanding department that is expanding rapidly there is always a need for more experienced staff.

However, as I have said, I think departments have become set in their ways. I find it disappointing to see ministers standing back and saying, 'I will have nothing to do with the department. The department must do its job.' As politicians we bring to this job an experience of dealing with the public and understanding what it wants. I believe it is completely wrong, even if the separation of powers says so, for a minister to sit back and say, 'I will have absolutely nothing to do with the department. It is the director-general's job and the director-general will make the decision.'

Time expired.