

Dean Wells MP - Ideas and action

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Bigotry

When the Goss Labor government was elected at the end of 1989, Queensland was the only mainland state that still had criminal penalties for homosexual acts between consenting adults. Nearly two decades later the climate is very different, but back then homophobia and bigotry based on gender preference was rampant in Queensland. To grasp the nettle and reform the law took political courage. It is unusual for Premiers to sit through more of their Ministers' speeches than they have to, but when Wells was about to introduce the decriminalisation Bill the atmosphere in the House was electric, and Premier Goss came into the Chamber and sat down next to his Attorney General. The Gallery heard Goss say as Wells rose to speak: "This is history Dean." That bit of Queensland history unfolded with these words.

In the past even the most dedicated of our police officers have shrunk from the odious responsibility of policing this law to the fullest extent. In doing so, police officers arguably are themselves in breach of the criminal law. Section 200 of the Criminal Code makes it an offence for public officials to fail to do their duty as required by law. Retaining the law as it stands makes criminals not only of many responsible adults but also of the police officers who enforce that law selectively. The Parliament cannot stand idly by while such a situation continues. The present policy of selective enforcement not only flouts the law established by the Parliament but also involves grave social dangers....

I do not want my children to grow up in an environment in which police are required by law to creep round people's homes at night, peer through their windows and listen at their keyholes. I do not want my children to grow up in an environment in which States can interfere to whatever extent they like in the private lives of their citizens, in which intolerance and bigotry make miserable the lives of a significant minority of the citizenry, and in which smear and innuendo, whether founded in fact or not,

can blight the happiness and destroy the career of someone with much to contribute to society. Instead, I want my children to inherit a world in which a rational public health policy is not impeded

by criminal sanctions, in which citizens' homes are their castles and in which Governments know that they must respect the privacy of citizens and serve them with tolerance and compassion.

This Bill will go some way towards achieving that objective. Honourable members can find details of the machinery provisions of this Bill in the explanatory notes. The fundamental principles of the Bill can be found in the hearts and minds of democrats. I commend the Bill to the House.

Queensland Parliamentary Debates 1990

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