

BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTS

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [10.03 pm]: I have come here this evening to provide a very brief statement regarding global events as they are unfurling in the streets of the United States, the United Kingdom and closer to home, on the back of comments previously expressed by Hon Alison Xamon, but more particularly comments expressed within the last 24 hours by one of her Greens colleagues, Senator Jordon Steele-John, via the social media platform Twitter.

I cannot actually accurately determine the emotion that drives me most at the moment in response to remarks of which I will advise the house. It is somewhere between anger and contempt. I will leave it there for now, because I think we have an opportunity to engage in credible, constructive public discourse and not contribute further to its deterioration. I think that is clearly where we are headed.

We are bearing witness globally to significant tumult in the form of protest, riot and violence, which comes alongside legitimate public protest and outrage at the despicable death of Mr George Floyd in Minneapolis in the United States of America. But what we have seen is that outrage metastasise, be accelerated, by organised political insurgents, and for this protest to turn into something that it was not intended to be by those who are most genuinely feeling the loss of Mr Floyd, and those African Americans who do face sustained racial prejudice in their homeland. But one might make the observation that the kind of mass hysteria and violence that we are bearing witness to in the streets of the United States and more recently in London is not the kind of protest that is permitted in those contented homogenised states of Iran and Russia, China or North Korea; it is somehow the Western liberal democracies of the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia that are blighted by our own freedoms and by our own democratic institutions. It is we who are constantly urged to turn inward to despise ourselves to the degree that we completely act in an ahistorical fashion—hysterically and ahistorically. For monuments in London dedicated to Winston Churchill, the greatest antifascist of all time, to be debased, to be scribbled upon, to be labelled as a fascist is the nadir of stupidity as is the labelling of a statue commemorating the last work of Mahatma Gandhi as a racist. An individual who liberated a nation from the British Empire is somehow a racist in the views of these people. Perhaps Mr Gandhi's crime was that he was not woke enough; he cannot meet the satisfaction of the current generation of authoritarian fascists masquerading as social justice warriors.

I could leave it there if this stupidity and this violence and this anarchism was not being deliberately imported into our community. I reflect very sadly on a series of tweets issued last night by the senator that I have previously mentioned. I will read them into *Hansard* because this demands to be on the public record. Senator Jordon Steele-John was responding quite favourably to the dispatch of a statue in—I believe it was—Bristol, a statue dedicated to a slave trader. One might leave it there, but Senator Jordon Steele-John thought that it was an appropriate opportunity to reflect upon commemorations, statues and memorials that exist in the state of this state's founders.

It's great to see these symbols of white supremacy being torn down—It's made me think a lot about how many similar statues & symbols we have here in WA:

There is a list of four of them with red crosses next to them. In order they are James Stirling, William Dampier, John Forrest, John Septimus Roe. The good senator went on —

The names of these men are literally EVERYWHERE

The following one reads —

Time to stop celebrating these men and hold them accountable for the roles they played in WA's history of First Nations Genocide

What would be the first symbol or statue you'd get rid of?

I'd start with Stirling Highway

This was the senator's contribution.

Freedom of speech, particularly that provided by public figures, demands an equal measure of public responsibility. I see nothing in these tweets other than an incitement to criminal behaviour, anarchy and vandalism. I responded to the senator on that platform last night, asking him to think about what he was doing. He did not have the courage to reply. I note that WA today followed up on the issue; again, the senator cowardly and cravenly refused to clarify his remarks. I might be moved to a modicum of grudging respect if he could come out and say, "Yes, that's what I was doing; tear them down", but he will not do that. He will leave it where it is. His contribution is an absolute disgrace. It must be condemned by his party colleagues and by anybody who holds dear their responsibilities to this community.

I will follow up on one last contribution made by someone who I believe to be a very honest person—Hon Alison Xamon. I might make an observation about a concept that has taken on a currency that is never debated and never questioned. It is the concept of white privilege. I completely and utterly reject that notion that somehow I should be the inheritor of generations upon generations upon generations of consolidated debt, of self-loathing, and that I have a historical legacy of criminality to extinguish through a process of self-abasement. I will not do that and I will not pass on that legacy of self-loathing to my children, who might be considered to be white but if we actually undertook the kind of sophisticated cultural and ethnic interrogation of their heritage, might prove to be something quite different. These are modern concepts, but I will not accept this parasitic mind cancer that is completely and utterly debasing debate, has absolutely tied us up in knots, and prevents us from doing anything approximating a constructive, positive way ahead or making a contribution to this state and its future that we can all be a part of.