

FEMINISM — TRANS AND NON-BINARY PEOPLE

Statement

HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West) [9.56 pm]: President, a personal word to start: to all my trans and non-binary friends, and to all the trans and non-binary people in our community, I say that I am sorry for the pain that you have suffered as a result of some of the things that were said and done at today's Standing for Women rally. I want to say to you that you have the love and support of by far the majority of people in this Parliament and, indeed, in the community of Western Australia. Angry, passionate rallies are common at Parliament House, but rarely do we witness the kind of cynical attempt to whip up hatred and fear that took place today with the rally convened by the self-styled leader of the Standing for Women Facebook group.

Now, I have never not been a feminist. By that, I mean that I was brought up without any particularly close encounters with views that might be called non-feminist: views such as girls are weaker than boys; girls cannot do certain jobs; or girls have an affinity with cleaning, cooking and child rearing. My lifelong commitment to feminism was sharpened up by the discovery, as a teenage classical cellist in the 1960s, that only one London symphony orchestra allowed women into its ranks—unless, oddly, they were a harpist. What is it with boys and harps?

I have never felt a particular need to qualify my feminist worldview. I suppose that working as a classical musician, an academic philosopher and now as a politician has drawn me, in a practical sense, to support the “let us in” liberal feminist catchcry. I have never espoused separatism, although I deeply respect those who do. I am uneasy about the poststructuralist submersion of feminism into intersectionality, although I can see its attraction for people trying to make sense of a world in which we seem to be seriously contemplating a second presidency for Donald Trump!

In both my head and my heart, though, I have been driven by the fairly straightforward observation that feminism is about fairness and that, as feminist activists, we ought to do whatever we can to remove unfairness. Many of the steps we have taken towards fairness have, by necessity, involved radical change—change to family life, education and the world of work. None of this has been easy and all of it has required courage.

If there is one thing that unites feminists under a common activist banner, it is that in pursuit of fairness feminists have been fearless. If that is true, what are we to make of the feminist banner commandeered by the group at today's rally? It seems they are driven by fear—the fear of men's presence in women's places, the fear of a future where men will effectively invade, often violently, all the spaces currently designated for women. Leave aside for a moment that this “what if” scenario is the same one the far right has used for decades to resist legislating for equal opportunity and against discrimination. Much more sinister is the way this group characterises those invading men. We are told, they are—I am quoting here—“men who are upset they cannot wear dresses because they have never been told no before”. They are also described as fetishists, homophobes, hair dye addicts and claimants to the title “a superior new class of men”. What seems to have really upset this group is the definition of a woman, sometimes now found as a secondary definition in respected dictionaries, as someone who identifies as female. Here we have, according to this group, an existential threat to women and girls the world over. It is leading to a move to somehow force children to change their gender against their will. This, apparently, is how men are planning to subvert the ends of feminism once and for all. Once these fetishising men are allowed to wear dresses, thereby taking over our spaces, the feminists will be put back in their box and inequality will rule in the twenty-first century, just as it did for most of the twentieth. The conclusion, I gather, is that all good feminists must rally around the real woman flag and see off all these marauding crossdressing men, just as we saw off the landed gentry in the 1900s and the chauvinist pigs in the 1970s. In seeing off the crossdressing men, we will also see the back of all those pesky pronouns, and teachers will once again be able to have a boys line and a girls line, as well as no-nonsense toilet protocols.

Unfortunately, while the Facebook shares and likes confirm that most people are happy to confine these views to the nut bag category, they are nevertheless causing great pain and damage. The real targets of this hate and fear are trans and non-binary people in our community who find themselves at the receiving end of the kind of hysteria reminiscent of the sixteenth century witch hunts. Aleardo Zanghellini is one of the few academics who has done scholarly work analysing these views, and it is on this work that I have drawn to suggest that the organisers of today's rally ought to pack up and go home, or perhaps seek out people like Pauline Hanson, with whom they clearly have so much in common.

First, while it is true that most violence is committed by men against women, we are beginning to understand that male violence is very much part of the warped culture of masculinity—what some have referred to as toxic masculinity—that still pervades our society. Read Jess Hill's brilliant exposé of this culture in her book *See What You Made Me Do*, if the concept is unfamiliar. To suggest that trans and non-binary people have been seeped in this culture is just absurd. Listen to the stories of trans and non-binary people and you hear about life spent as an outsider, about not fitting into the prevailing culture of what it means to be male.

Second, who exactly is it challenging the right that women have to feel safe in women's spaces? Is it men? All men? It is a fact established by the recent royal commission and thousands of court cases in the last decade that most sexual

abuse of children is perpetrated by men. We could, of course, stop all this sexual abuse right now by banning all men from having any contact with children. Are we going to do that? Of course we are not. Not only is it impracticable; it would also be patently unfair. Most men do not sexually abuse children. Most men have loving, nurturing relationships with the children in their lives. We prevent child sexual abuse by having robust ways of preventing the abuse occurring, and it is exactly the same if you shift the focus from children to women. Safe spaces have to be exactly that, and those people who threaten that safety have to be prevented from accessing those spaces. There is no evidence anywhere that trans or non-binary people are likely to be over-represented amongst those who threaten the safety of people in public toilets and other women's spaces.

I have referred to today's rally as being fearful and hate-filled. It has always been my experience that the most powerful way to argue against hate and fear is with love. For that reason, I want to finish with the words of artist and author Alok Vaid-Menon, who performed their superb *Love Letter to the Man Who Punched Me on the Melbourne Tram* in Sydney last year. I consider it to be one of my life's great fortunes to have heard the first rendition of this letter, and I urge everyone to seek it out and make it part of their strength every time they confront hate and fear. Here is the background to the love letter. Travelling on public transport in broad daylight after one of their performances, a man bumped into ALOK before punching them in the face and saying "I'm okay with gay people, but you're too much." ALOK continues —

"I was waiting for someone on the tram to do something ... for someone to intervene. But people just kind of passively watched. And I think that hurt me even more than the man who punched me.

"After getting a standing ovation for my intellect [at the talk just hours prior], no one was actually there to protect my personhood ... This is not about gender. It's actually about humanity."

ALOK continues —

"Trans and gender-nonconforming people anticipate violence everywhere we go. And it's getting worse," ... "Every restaurant, every street, every city, every school, every place that I go, people harass me ... And my story is one of millions. I'm just privileged enough to have the platform to say it."

ALOK's love letter offers both forgiveness to their attacker and an explanation of how such violence can be countered once we learn to broaden our understanding of gender beyond rigid concepts of man and woman. In a genuine expression of inclusivity, the love letter says that we are all equally deserving of love and respect. For ALOK, that includes gender conforming men and women as well as men who do not feel that they are "masculine" enough, women who do not feel that they are "feminine" enough, and, however he self-describes, the man who punched ALOK on the Melbourne tram. It is this love and respect that I extend to the whole LGBTQIA+ community tonight.

House adjourned at 10.06 pm
