

Bill introduced, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile.

Second Reading

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE [11.22 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The object of the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011 is to amend the Education Act 1990 to repeal the provision inserted by the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 which allows special education in ethics as a secular alternative to special religious education at government schools. The effect of the repeal will be delayed until the beginning of the next school year immediately following the commencement of the proposed Act. This simple and concise bill contains the following three clauses:

1 Name of Act

This Act is the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Act 2011.

2 Commencement

This Act commences on the date of assent to this Act.

3 Amendment of Education Act 1990 No 8

(1) Section 33A Special education in ethics as secular alternative to special religious education

Omit the section.

(2) Schedule 3 Savings, transitional and other provisions

Insert at the end of the Schedule with appropriate Part and clause numbering:

Part Provision consequent on enactment of Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Act 2011

Repeal of provision relating to special education in ethics

The repeal of section 33A by the *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Act 2011* does not have effect in relation to the provision of ethics classes in government schools until the beginning of the next school year immediately following the commencement of the Act. As has already been said, there has been extensive debate in the community and wide coverage in the media, in particular, in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the ABC and others, in relation to this bill and my perceived actions regarding the future of the secular humanist so-called ethics course. I believe that that course does not teach children right from wrong but promotes the secular humanist relative philosophy where there are no absolutes, such as "You shall not murder", "You shall not lie", and "You shall not steal." Even Dr Knight, who conducted the review for the Australian Labor Party Government, said that the course should not be called an ethics course; rather, it should be called a philosophical relativism course,

with which I agree. Relative ethics is the basis of secular humanism. I believe, and I know other members will disagree, that that is the philosophy we saw during World War II with the Nazis and communists.

Dr John Kaye: That is outrageous. You just called St James Ethics Centre a bunch of Nazis. That is absolutely shameful.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I am saying that those philosophies followed situation ethics—

Dr John Kaye: Point of order: That was an act of extreme cowardice. To claim that those at the St James Ethics Centre are Nazis—

The PRESIDENT: Order! There is no point of order.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I made no reference to the St James Ethics Centre; I was speaking about the philosophy.

Dr John Kaye: You called them Nazis.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I never called anyone a Nazi.

Dr John Kaye: You did.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I never did; I was speaking of the philosophy. Situation ethics were followed by other regimes such as the Nazis and the communists. Situation ethics means that nothing is right and nothing is wrong; therefore, human beings can be killed without any embarrassment or reservation. Situation ethics is a dangerous philosophy upheld by The Greens. I agree with the need for the teaching of true ethics in schools, colleges and universities in New South Wales. Those ethics should be based on history's greatest teacher of ethics, the Lord Jesus Christ, who presented Almighty God's moral ethic for the human race beginning with the Ten Commandments. Of course, as members know, Jesus Christ was far more than a teacher of ethics. He came into the world to be the saviour, to seek and to save that which was lost, which is the Gospel.

I sincerely regret that some parents, I assume, have objections to Christianity or scriptures and may be atheists, and will prevent their children from learning about the most important aspect of our Australian culture, our Christian heritage and faith. Even our atheistic Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, said recently, "All children should have a knowledge of the *Bible*". She said:

... what comes from the Bible has formed an important part of our culture. It's impossible to understand Western literature without having that key of understanding the Bible stories and how Western literature builds on them and reflects them and deconstructs them and brings them back together".

I thank the Prime Minister for her comments. I am concerned that there has been a subtle change during the regime of the Federal Government. Estimates have been given of up to 100,000 children in special religious education classes. Previously, the policy was that children would attend special religious education and scripture classes unless their parents wrote a letter asking for the child to be withdrawn. Some schools have reversed that policy by saying they want a letter from parents indicating the child is to attend religious education classes. That is a reversal of the traditional policy since 1880 and may account for what

appears to be an increased number of children not attending religious education classes.

In view of the media commentary, I wish to state for the record that I have not sought to blackmail the Coalition Government. I simply reminded the Government, before it flatly rejected my Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill, that it should consult and remember that it needs our votes to pass its legislation, particularly the controversial industrial relations legislation. I never said that I would vote against the legislation, even though I had genuine concerns about the impact of it. This is important. During my meeting with the Premier on Thursday 28 July—a meeting held at his request—we did not discuss the industrial relations legislation or my vote on any matter. Members may be surprised to hear that. We only discussed the best way forward for my ethics repeal bill. We came to the conclusion that my bill could proceed through the Coalition cabinet and then to the party room for discussion.

I have no way of controlling the Coalition party room, but I hope that through the discussion in the party room it may lead the 88 members to agree that they can support my bill in due course. The bill will be adjourned to 16 September by the Hon. Paul Green to allow those discussions to take place. I also want to provide an opportunity for the church leaders to give further consideration to their position. There has been some thought, because of the extreme views of The Greens and others, whether the church should avoid controversy by saying nothing more about the Education Amendment (Ethics) Bill. This is being discussed within the church. No-one in the church supports the ethics course. There is no question about that. The church is wondering only how to avoid controversy and perhaps some backlash against those special religious education teachers in our government schools.

My intention throughout the whole process has been to hold the Coalition Government to its original election policy. The Coalition, along with Christian church leaders, condemned the Education Amendment (Ethics) Bill in this House and in the other place. The Coalition voted against the bill, opposing the Australian Labor Party and The Greens'. Christian church leaders have requested that I do whatever I can. As members know, I campaigned strongly during the recent State election on that issue. That is why I introduced a repeal bill on behalf of my constituents, as well as those who voted for the Australian Labor Party or Liberal Party, but agree with the policies and strategies of the Christian Democratic Party.

Unfortunately, just prior to the State election on 26 March 2011, the now Premier told me—wrongly as it turns out—that the Coalition believed The Greens would hold the balance of power in the New South Wales upper House. He told me, privately at the time, that despite his desire to continue with his original policy he believed the Australian Labor Party and The Greens, if they controlled the balance of power, would block any attempt to repeal the bill. However, as members know, and the Hon. Dr John Kaye has made the point very clearly in his contribution this morning, the Christian Democratic Party, in cooperation with the Shooters and Fishers Party, now holds the balance of power—I call it the balance of prayer and responsibility—and not the pagan Greens, who are no longer relevant in New South Wales. That is part of their anger and criticism of what I am endeavouring to do.

Given the outcome of the election the Coalition can now implement its original 2010 policy. In due course, I trust, it will vote for the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill, which states that ethics courses will conclude in December 2011. School principals will have time to arrange suitable quality educational opportunities for children who are withdrawn from scripture classes in 2012 by their parents. Some church leaders were concerned that the repeal bill, if implemented immediately, would disrupt New South Wales schools. The church leaders do not want that to happen and neither do I. That is not my intention.

The St James Ethics Centre is now a secular centre. Some people believe that St James Ethics Centre is a voice for the Christian community. It is no longer in that role. The recent article by Dr Simon Longstaff in the *Sydney Morning Herald* contains a number of fallacies. First, he claims the churches now support the secular ethics course. The churches do not support it. That is the point I am making. The churches still strongly oppose it. I have a handwritten memo from Arch Bishop Peter Jensen. It states:

I have always opposed the introduction of the ethics classes and regard it as an unfortunate breach of our long established principle.

Cardinal Pell has also contacted me. Cardinal Pell and Arch Bishop Peter Jensen are anxious there be no drawn out controversy in the media and in the public school system and particularly that the church's position not be misrepresented—as it has been in this debate—to say that the Christian churches oppose ethics. That then becomes a headline that is untrue. The church and Christians support the Judea-Christian ethic. The church and Christians have reservations about a secular humanist ethics course which does not teach the children what is right or wrong according to its founders, its organisers.

Secondly, Dr Longstaff claims that I wish to repudiate the whole tradition of western thought. That is not true. Thirdly, he says it is wrong that I, Fred Nile, repudiate honesty, respect and moral courage—quite to the contrary. Dr Longstaff's comments are ironic, given that one of the major objections I have about the so-called ethics course is that it explicitly does not teach morals, so it should not be called an ethics course. It is a course on philosophical discussion. Dr Knight said it is dealing with philosophical relativism. Fourthly, Dr Longstaff criticised me using the language that "might was right", stating that I am using political power gained through having the balance of power in the House. However, he has forgotten when the ethics legislation was originally introduced in 2010 the Australian Labor Party and The Greens used their might to force the ethics bill through the Parliament, particularly the upper House. This is the ethical issue: The Greens and the Australian Labor Party rammed the bill through before Christmas because they knew they were going to be thrown out of Government; they knew they were going to lose the election. Their strategy was to tie the hands of a new democratically elected government.

Dr John Kaye: Was it a democratically elected government?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: The Coalition was democratically elected, but The Greens wanted to block the process. They thought they would have the balance of power, so they rammed the legislation through this place before Christmas to ensure that the new Government would not be able to reverse the process. That is what happened in a number of cases. When it suits them, The Greens believe that might is right. I appreciate why Dr Longstaff is defensive given the serious questions being asked about the validity of his course. Nevertheless, I believe it is unethical to engage in the sort invective and characterisation in his article and some of the reports in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

I remind members and Dr Longstaff that Socrates—the philosopher to whom he often refers—was virtually alone and was ultimately executed because he dared to question the majority world view. He questioned what young people were being taught and the value of education. As we know, he was forced to take poison to end his life. I am simply questioning what children are being taught and the value of secular ethics education. As I have said a number of times, the course does not teach ethics as most parents understand the term and that is why they have questioned the churches' desire to get rid of the classes. We all want our children to be taught about what is right and what is wrong and the Ten Commandments, and

people wonder why the churches would oppose that. However, they do not understand the specific nature of the so-called ethics course that is being offered to about 100,000 children in this State.

Some people tell me not to worry about it and say that they will concentrate on scripture teachers and special religious education. But what about those 100,000 children and those who are attending the ethics course? I understand that only 2,700 children are participating in the course. Because such a small number are involved some church leaders have told me that I am wasting my time pursuing this legislation. The ethics course is a dismal failure because of the 100,000 children who do not attend scripture classes only 2,700 have enrolled in ethics classes. That is despite their promotion by a number of teachers and in some Department of Education literature, which states that all children should have the opportunity to participate in the classes, not only those who do not attend scripture. That resulted in a number of children moving from scripture classes to the ethics course.

Dr John Kaye: How many?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Dr Kaye will be pleased to know that a number of them have subsequently abandoned that course because it is so boring.

Dr John Kaye: Then why are you so worried about it?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I am simply saying that some church leaders do not believe we should be worried. However, I have a Christian conscience and I am concerned for the children who participate in secular ethics classes. I have a responsibility to them and I will not allow them to be abused or misled by that propaganda.

The Hon. Scot MacDonald: Point of order: I cannot hear Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile.

The DEPUTY-PRESIDENT (The Hon. Jennifer Gardiner): Order! I am having difficulty hearing Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile. Members will allow him to be heard in silence.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Dr Longstaff assured me and others that we should not be worried because there is no movement to change religious education. He knows that even some of his own supporters, members of organisations such as the Teachers Federation, The Greens, the left wing of the Australian Labor Party and others wrongly believe that the separation of church and State means that there should be no religious education in government schools

Dr John Kaye: Did you say separation is wrong?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: She said "right".

The Hon. Cate Faehrmann: No, I laughed.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: She did not.

Dr John Kaye: She did.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Members know that what I am saying is true. Those groups are now attacking the new chaplaincy program in government schools, which was introduced by the Howard Government and which has been supported by the Gillard

Government. Those people who question the value of religious education and scripture classes wrongly believe that when Sir Henry Parkes introduced state education and said that it should be free and secular he meant that it should be non-Christian or non-religious. That was never his intention. In the 1880s, the term "secular" was used in a specific way to prohibit denominational teaching in New South Wales classrooms—that is, teaching the tenets of the Catholic, Baptist or Presbyterian faiths. He had no objection to scripture classes, which he decreed should be held for one hour each day. The official arrangement now is one hour of scripture classes each week. However, scripture teachers tell me that because of the administrative arrangements in many schools they are fortunate if they get 20 minutes in the class.

I make it clear to members that I have never said that the Premier should break his word. My position is that he should simply uphold the Coalition's original decision, particularly given that it strongly opposed and voted against the legislation that enabled the introduction of ethics classes. The Coalition quite rightly saw it as a long-term threat to the continuation of special religious education. Dr Longstaff became militant and sought to incite a mob uprising against me and my actions. His actions are more akin to those that he despises. Perhaps he should have a lesson in ethics. The *Sydney Morning Herald's* campaign in support of ethics classes is obvious on the letters page of that newspaper in that 99 per cent of the letters published have been critical of my actions.

The editorial published on 4 August is wrong in its assertion that "among the recent legacies of the NSW Government, few enjoy as much mainstream bipartisan political support and community endorsement as the introduction of ethics classes in state schools". The *Sydney Morning Herald* acknowledges that many people have made submissions opposing the introduction of the ethics course. A petition signed by 50,000 New South Wales citizens opposing ethics classes was presented in the other place and I have presented similar petitions in this place day after day. The *Sydney Morning Herald's* claim that the policy has widespread community endorsement is wrong. It is now claiming that a vote for the Coalition was a vote for the ethics course. I totally reject that; a vote for the Coalition was a vote against a corrupt, divided and inefficient Labor Government. That was what voters focused on when they went to the ballot box. Polling undertaken before the election indicated that the Labor Government would be thrown out. Anybody else could have been elected to throw them out.

The Hon. Lynda Voltz: So what you are saying is that none of Barry's promises count?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: They all count, but the ethics course was not the key policy that people were voting for.

The Hon. Lynda Voltz: If he made a promise on ethics it does not count; the Premier's word is not as good as what he says—is that what you are saying?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I am saying that the Labor Party was so bad that it was going to lose the election even if he had no policies. Many Coalition voters and our own Christian Democratic Party voters assumed that if the Coalition were elected it would repeal the Labor-Greens ethics bill, which was rammed through the Parliament just prior to Christmas—an unethical approach to an unethical bill. The New South Wales Parents and Citizens' Associations annual conference statement claims that all their members support the ethics course and do not support my repeal bill, but I know that in many parents and citizens' associations there has been a change in culture and a change in leadership of the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations so that it now reflects more closely the policy of the

Teachers Federation. The parents and citizens organisation now reflects more closely the Teachers Federation—in other words, it has become more radical. People have questioned some of the policies—

The Hon. Lynda Voltz: The world has changed.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: In the past parents and citizens meetings were peaceful and well behaved. However, if a person stands up at some parents and citizens meetings and says, "I oppose the ethics course", he or she will be screamed at, shouted at and told to sit down. That never used to happen in the parents and citizens organisation in all the time it was in existence. A number of organisations have been critical of the ethics course. As we know, during the previous debate, the current Minister for Education spoke strongly against the bill.

As members know, I also moved amendments during debate to add the word "philosophical" before the word "ethics", but those amendments were rejected by the House. Dr Sue Knight made it very clear—and she did the evaluation, handpicked by the Labor Government—that it should be called "philosophical relativism". As I indicated, I want to allow time for calm, rational consideration of this bill. Debate will be adjourned until 16 September 2011 so that further consideration can be given to the bill by the Coalition and other members of the House—I hope even the Labor Party, but I do not expect The Greens to give any consideration to it at all.