



Speech by
**Hon. BRIAN
LITTLEPROUD**

MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS

Hansard 10 March 1999

CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND PENALTIES AND SENTENCES AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs—NPA) (9.33 p.m.): I am pleased to follow the member for Crows Nest in this debate. He spoke about his experience in the portfolio of Police and Corrective Services. He did not tell the House that he was also part of a coalition committee that travelled around the State. He, along with the member for Indooroopilly and I, travelled from Cairns to the Gold Coast and inland to Toowoomba. We picked up the messages that are reflected in the sort of legislation passed by the Borbidge Government and that are now being reflected in this private member's Bill. It is also reflected in the speeches of colleagues who are either Independents or members of One Nation.

It is interesting that the members sitting on the Government benches today came to power with one of the lowest votes ever for Labor, yet they are in Government.

Mr Schwarten: And you got Labor preferences to get you up!

Mr LITTLEPROUD: I sure did. That is pretty irrelevant, because a lot of Labor members would not be here if they had not been helped along a little bit, either.

It is a matter of listening. Those opposite can follow ideology and say that the people should not be listened to and that we know best, or they can go out and listen to the people. They will tell members opposite that we have to fix things up. The penalties and sentences legislation introduced by the member for Indooroopilly when he was Attorney-General toughened things up again after they had been relaxed under the Goss Government. Now we are going down the track of relaxing things even further. We responded to the messages we got from all those community meetings we held across the length and breadth of Queensland. We talked about juvenile justice, about drugs and about violent crime. Tonight we are focusing on violent crime.

I owe it to the people of Chinchilla to speak tonight. About two weeks ago the courts finally made a decision on the case of a young lady who originated from Chinchilla, Jenny Black. She lost her life somewhere near a nightclub at the Riverside Centre. Her body was finally found in the river. I was initially contacted last week when the decision was handed down. The decision of the court was manslaughter and the culprit was sentenced to 11 years' jail, with parole after four and a half years. He has already spent two years in jail. The family contacted me and I have been contacted by more people in the community since I went home for the weekend. I owe it to the people of Chinchilla to put the case tonight.

This is ironic. The crime was committed when the legislation enacted by the Goss Government was in place. The judge found that the crime was manslaughter and he has given the sentence accordingly. If the piece of legislation the Borbidge Government brought in had been in force when the crime was committed, the same offender would have served 80% of his sentence, because it was a violent crime.

The family and the community of Chinchilla point out to me that the lady's body showed that she had been tied by a rope to a very large piece of wood and dumped in the river. One would have thought that action was premeditated. The person charged was found to have pretty severe scratching to the face. I cannot say much against the judge, but the people of Chinchilla are asking how the dickens it can be accidental killing when the girl defended herself to that extent.

When I explained to the people of Chinchilla that the legislation the Borbidge Government put in place would have kept the offender in jail for at least 80% of his sentence and after that he could have gone on parole, they said that would have been better. I told them that the piece of legislation currently being debated relates to offenders serving 100% of their sentences. They showed a fair bit of support for that, so I owe it to them to make that comment.

Having said that, I will comment on a couple of things said tonight during the debate. First, the member of Bundaberg insisted that it is well known that unless there is some sort of reward system in the prison system it simply will not work. So she was saying that there need to be remissions and parole; otherwise, the system will not work and all hell will break loose.

I have been a member of the corrective services committee. I have been a shadow Minister for Corrective Services. I have travelled to and visited prisons in South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales and all the prisons of Queensland. I can tell the honourable member for Bundaberg that I think standards are more about the way the prisons are managed than about the incentives being held out.

At the time, I was amazed that the Queensland prisons seemed to display mutual respect. The prisoners were being treated with respect by the people in charge of the prisons. The prisoners also knew that they were paying a penalty. They were not trying to make deals for things that they wanted. They knew that certain things were expected of them. This situation varied across Queensland prisons, but some were excellent. The people in charge of the institutions also knew that they had a job to do.

Prisons across Australia varied remarkably. I think the worst prison I went through was Pentridge in Victoria. I saw unbelievable personal abuse of visitors and staff as they walked through the prison. That is all about management of prisons. If the prisoners are getting away with a bit—the member for Crows Nest talked about them being in charge if we go soft—suddenly they are in charge. I think the argument of the member for Bundaberg lacks substance. I am more convinced that it is about the management of the institution than about the incentives of remissions and parole. I will put aside that particular argument.

The other argument that I want to rebut is that put forward by the member for Ashgrove. During his dissertation, he said that we have too much overcrowding in Queensland prisons. Then he seemed to relate that to how we should not put violent criminals in jail for so long. I rebut that by saying that, yes, with people like fine defaulters, drug users and people who are convicted of lesser crimes, we have to be smarter in how we go about correcting them. But in terms of this legislation, we are talking about people who commit violent crimes.

I notice that the member for Rockhampton is moving back to his seat. He is part and parcel of a program that is trying to improve the security of old people and pensioners in their homes. We all applaud that, because that is addressing a concern. People are concerned about their safety. They are concerned about violent attacks on themselves. This legislation is about targeting those people.

The member for Ashgrove is right in saying that there are too many people in prison and that those people are the fine defaulters and others who have been convicted of lesser crimes. We can find ways around that. But I say to the member: please do not argue that, because we have too much overcrowding in prisons, we should go soft on the penalties for violent crimes.

I believe that the sentiments expressed by the community of Chinchilla over the past two weeks are pretty indicative of what is felt generally right across Queensland. I have travelled throughout Queensland and have listened to people speaking about these problems and talking about the solutions. We on this side of the House are about trying to introduce legislation that the people want. Members opposite seem to be bogged down in dogma. They have just recorded one of the lowest ever votes for the Labor Party, so they should think again, because perhaps they are not right at all.
