



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND PENALTIES AND SENTENCES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (10.37 p.m.): Tonight, it gives me pleasure to rise to support this Bill put forward by the member for Warwick.

Mr Foley: Another Liberal sell-out.

Mr LAMING: It is interesting to hear the Attorney-General so quick to interject, because some of the points that I would like to raise are in response to the points that he raised in his response to this Bill. I made a note of them as best I could as he was speaking. He asked: does the Bill address the community's real concerns about crime? I hope that I have noted his comments accurately. I really believe that this Bill does, because ordinary Queenslanders are very, very concerned about sentencing. If one talks to ordinary people—and they have views on these sorts of things—one finds that it is not so much the length of the sentence that is actually given that they argue about, but rather when prisoners are given parole and they do not serve the sentence that the judge hands down.

The second point raised by the Attorney-General was that there was no consultation on this Bill. I wonder what he means by "consultation". Does he mean going out and having meetings between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. between Monday and Friday with select people from different interest groups who can get along to consultation sessions at that time when ordinary people are at work trying to earn a living? One's job as a member of Parliament involves listening to constituents, opening letters, reading the mail, answering telephone calls, talking to people over the back fence and talking to relatives.

Mr Littleproud: The member for Indooroopilly, the member for Crows Nest and I had a dozen meetings all around Queensland, and I can verify that the public said at night-time meetings that they wanted an answer.

Mr LAMING: Yes. The honourable member might recall that I attended those meetings, too. I remember them well.

Mr Foley: Is this a private discussion or can we join in?

Mr LAMING: I have not forgotten about the Attorney's remarks. There are a few more to come. The other claim that was made by the Attorney-General related to the claim that there was no step-by-step re-introduction back into the community. I think I have that one right. The Attorney-General is wrong again. There is a step by step reintroduction of offenders back into the community. The only difference between this legislation and the existing legislation is that the step-by-step re-introduction back into the community is done in the offender's time. After the sentence has been served there is exactly the same process so that former offenders are rehabilitated back into the community in their time and not during the time when they should be serving their sentences.

There is another claim that no economic impact study was prepared. I know there is plenty of criticism of what Governments spend on various things. I heard the member for Sandgate say that there is never going to be enough money to spend on health, education and many of the other very worthwhile projects with which Governments are involved. However, I think if we asked people in the street whether they object to money being spent on truth in sentencing, we would find that those same people would not object to it because they would see that spending as being well placed.

The Attorney-General quoted from and tabled a media document entitled "Top judges blast moves to change sentences". The Attorney-General then responded to an interjection by saying that Parliament makes the laws. In referring to this media document, and tabling it, the Attorney-General

then embraces judges who go on the public record criticising the legislation being debated. This comes from a worthy member who is often talking about the separation of powers. He cannot have it both ways. If the Legislature cannot interfere with the Executive and cannot interfere with the judiciary, neither should judges be interfering with our process. If there is to be separation of powers, it must apply equally to the three groups involved.

If we ask ordinary Queenslanders about what gets up their noses with regard to sentencing, we find that they say, "What can you do about those judges who give these parole periods?" People are referring to the legislation that existed before the coalition brought in the 80% rule. A lot of the previous sentences are still coming through the system. I am sure Government members find that most of the phone calls they receive in their offices come from people who say, "What are you going to do about these laws? What are you going to do about these judges who are giving these parole periods and who are not giving people truth in sentencing?" If Government members are honest about this, they will agree with me.

The Attorney-General suggested that we should go along and talk to the Neighbourhood Watch groups. I go along to a few Neighbourhood Watch meetings. Maybe the Attorney-General and I should go to the same meetings and ask the people involved what they think about these lengthy parole periods and whether they believe that there should be truth in sentencing. We could ask people whether they believe that offenders should serve the entire length of their sentences. We must bear in mind here that we are talking about serious violent offences. We are not talking about minor crimes. We are talking about people who have been found guilty of serious violent offences.

An Opposition member: Horrendous crimes!

Mr LAMING: Horrendous crimes. That is a good word. Thank you. I caught the latter part of the contribution from the member for Sandgate. I do not believe any member in this House would disagree with some of the points that he raised. We need to place a lot of emphasis on the input into crime. The member probably mentioned a few more things which I did not hear because I came in halfway through his contribution. I am sure he was talking about such things as education on drugs and alcohol, problems with family breakdown and youth suicide. I heard him speak about unemployment.

It is very rare when I get up on my hind legs in this place that I do not talk about unemployment. I have a passion about it. I believe that we must do more and more to insist that people get every opportunity to make a contribution to the community. People are expected to make a contribution and in that way they have some feeling for the community. Employment takes people away from a life in crime because they feel that they are part of the community. I have no argument with the points raised by the member for Sandgate. I am quite sure that no-one on either side of the House would disagree with me.

Again I remind honourable members that we are talking about people who have been found guilty of serious and violent offences. Once people get to that stage—and it is a very sad state of affairs—a whole different set of circumstances comes into play. I believe it is the let-off provisions in the sentencing process that annoy people. We have to look at what sentencing is all about. It is all about protection of the community by incarcerating serious violent offenders. It is all about the punishment of the offender. We should not resile from that. It is about being a deterrent to future potential offenders. We should not resile from that, either. It is also about rehabilitation of cooperative prisoners.

If we examine each of those elements against the Bill put forward by the member for Warwick, we will see that the provisions are enhanced. We enhance the protection of the community by making people stay in jail for their full sentences. We enhance the punishment of offenders if we insist on making the punishment fit the crime and if we have truth in sentencing. We enhance—and this is most important—the deterrent aspect of sentencing if we make offenders serve their full time. If people think that they are going to have to serve a full sentence for a crime there will be a significant deterrent effect.

I suspect those opposite might suggest that the rehabilitation provisions contained in this Bill are not as good as those in the existing legislation. I do not accept that. The rehabilitation process is there and it is merely deferred and is undertaken during the offender's time and not during the community's time when the offender should be in prison. When we break the elements of this Bill down there is very little left in the Government's criticism of the Bill.

I appeal to Government members to consider voting on this Bill as if they were given advice by their own constituents. If honourable members opposite ask for advice down at the local club or pub or over the back fence—

Mr Fenlon: The local One Nation branch?

Mr LAMING: If you wanted to go along to the local One Nation branch you would find that you would get the same sort of advice there as you would get at your local branch meeting. I have not been

to a Labor Party branch meeting but I imagine that a lot of good people in the Labor Party go along to branch meetings and they would agree with this legislation.

Have members opposite asked their branch members whether they agree with the truth in sentencing provisions contained within this Bill? It is unfortunate that there are none of them in the gallery tonight, because I might have taken a punt and asked them. I think they are over on Level 7. We might get them over here before the vote is taken and let members opposite ask them whether they agree with the truth in sentencing provisions in this Bill. One Nation branch members and ALP branch members——

Mr Littleproud interjected.

Mr LAMING: I suspect that, if honourable members took the advice of their friends and relatives and even their branch members and voted accordingly tonight, this Bill would pass tonight.
