



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard 24 March 1999

CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND PENALTIES AND SENTENCES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (9.12 p.m.): It is my pleasure to join in the debate on the Corrective Services and Penalties and Sentences Amendment Bill. As other speakers on this side of the House have pointed out, the proposal before the House tonight was a promise that the coalition made to the people of Queensland. This Bill is the fulfilment of that promise.

The coalition raised the minimum portion of sentences to be served from 50% to 80%. We are now proposing that it be raised to 100%. That, I would suggest all of us realise, is in response to changing community expectations. Those changing community expectations have been referred to by speakers on both sides of the House, strangely enough.

I think the member for Bundaberg, who spoke in this debate some weeks ago now, recognised more than anybody else, on the other side of the House at least, community expectations. I think those of us who were in the House on the night the member made her contribution will remember not only the words that the member for Bundaberg said, but also the almost palpable fear in her voice and the expression on her face when she addressed the suggestion that had been made that her electorate may well find out how she votes. I found that a little strange. I thought one of the basic tenets of this job was that we go back and report to our electorates the positions we take on their behalf on a number of issues.

The member for Bundaberg, like so many other members, quite rightly identified the groundswell of community support for this proposition but, probably like some other members on the other side of the House, is locked into a position where she has to vote against it. That then understandably gives rise to the fear we saw expressed here that night that her constituents would find out how she voted.

Government members interjected.

Mr SEENEY: I think those opposite who interject without anything meaningful to say should read Hansard. The Hansard record does not properly record that most extraordinary scene we saw here that night, when the member for Bundaberg said that she was being "threatened that the names of members who did not support the Bill would be circulated in their electorates". I assure not only the member for Bundaberg—

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member is misleading the House in relation to what I said. I find it offensive and I ask for those comments to be withdrawn.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Nelson-Carr): Order! Will the member for Callide withdraw those statements?

Mr SEENEY: I would like to know what it is that I am expected to withdraw. Could I ask the member what it is that she finds offensive? The last thing I said was a quote from Hansard.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Which comments would the member for Bundaberg like withdrawn?

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: I would like withdrawn the comments attributed to me. They are not an accurate report of what I said in this House. I find it offensive and I want it withdrawn, please.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Callide will withdraw the statements.

Mr SEENEY: Madam Deputy Speaker, are you asking me to withdraw a quote from Hansard?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am asking you to withdraw those statements. There is a point of order.

Mr SEENEY: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will defer to your ruling, but I am struggling to understand what it is.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: So you withdraw the statements? Thank you.

Mr SEENEY: Are you asking me to withdraw the quote from Hansard?

Mr MICKEL: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order——

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just withdraw the offensive words.

Mr MICKEL: There is no question about it. You have asked the member for Callide to withdraw. The reference to complying in deference to the Chair is a reflection on you. He should withdraw unequivocally.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the member for Callide withdraw those offensive words?

Mr SEENEY: Whatever it was that I said that was offensive to the member for Bundaberg I withdraw. I will, however, repeat the last thing I said, which was a quote from Hansard. The member for Bundaberg said——

"... we were threatened that the names of members who did not support the Bill would be circulated in their electorates ..."

I find that an extraordinary suggestion.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. That is not an accurate quote from Hansard; it is part of a quote from Hansard. It is misleading the House and I would like it withdrawn, please.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I do not think that is a point of order. The member for Callide should not be quoting from Hansard of the same session. Does the member withdraw?

Mr SEENEY: This is Hansard of 10 March.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! It is the same session. Does the member withdraw those statements?

Mr SEENEY: Madam Deputy Speaker, if you ask me to withdraw them I shall withdraw them.

Mr Mickel: He is reflecting on the Chair, for goodness' sake!

Mr SEENEY: Madam Deputy Speaker, I withdraw unreservedly anything that may have offended the sensibilities of the member for Bundaberg. I think I have offended all of them, but they are all——

Mr Lucas: You've certainly offended me.

Mr SEENEY: The member for Lytton claims that he is offended. I do not really think that is possible.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Could the member get on with his speech?

Mr SEENEY: I make the point, without quoting the passage from Hansard that is found so offensive by the member for Bundaberg, that it is a basic right of every person in every electorate to know how their elected members have voted on every piece of legislation. I assure the member for Bundaberg that her electorate is not very far away from mine. We share a number of common media outlets, and she can be absolutely assured that her electorate will know which way she votes on this particular piece of legislation.

Mr McGrady: At least they tell the truth.

Mr SEENEY: I always tell the truth.

Mr SULLIVAN: I rise to a point of order. The member has again misled the House. He is again trying to confuse this House by saying that the member is trying to hide her vote. She has never said that. She, other members and I object to people writing to us threatening that they will carry out a course of action if we do not do what they say. That is the point that the member has made. He is misleading the House by trying to twist the member for Bundaberg's comments.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member will withdraw those comments.

Mr SEENEY: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not sure what that was all about.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am not sure either.

Mr SEENEY: Perhaps the higher standards of parliamentary behaviour that we were promised have eluded the Government Whip.

Mr SULLIVAN: I rise to a point of order. I find those words offensive. I absolutely do understand what is meant by parliamentary behaviour. What I object to is the member's twisting of a colleague's words and his deliberate misleading by his half-truths and lies.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member will continue his speech.

Mr SEENEY: Perhaps the Government Whip might like to get himself on the list of speakers at some future time in this debate instead of continually interrupting me.

As I was saying, this legislation is an understandable reaction to changes in community expectations. Those community expectations are the same no matter whether one lives in Bundaberg or in any other electorate. Every member of every community will be watching closely to see which way their elected members vote. I assure the member for Bundaberg that our local media—the local media that we share—will take a very close interest in the way the members who are elected from that part of Queensland vote on this particular piece of legislation.

The community is demanding that a fitting sentence be served for violent crimes. They are demanding that a fitting punishment be imposed and that a fitting sentence be served. I strongly question the assertion that has been made here by members on the other side of the House that strong punishment and the serving of a full sentence are not major deterrents. That assertion has been made over and over again without any basis—without anything to back it up.

Mr Sullivan: We make the laws, the police enforce them, and the judiciary judges.

Mr SEENEY: If members opposite want to turn this into a shouting match, I am confident of my abilities to handle that particular situation. However, in line with the Speaker's ruling—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will continue with his speech.

Mr SEENEY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I said, if members opposite want to turn this into a shouting match, I am confident of my abilities to handle that situation.

Members opposite have been constantly wrong in the assertions that they have made about this legislation. It shows that they have not been listening to the other side of the argument and they quite clearly have not read the Bill. The member for Archerfield cited a number of examples—ridiculous examples—none of which would have been covered by the provisions of this Bill. None of the quite silly examples that she put forward as justification for opposing this Bill would actually have been covered by the Bill.

Mr Mickel interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Logan must not interject from other than his correct seat.

Mr SEENEY: This Bill applies to serious violent offenders. The nonsense examples that were raised by the member for Archerfield are not even covered by the Bill.

Mr Reeves: You've lost it.

Mr SEENEY: I am trying desperately not to turn this into a shouting match.

The other part of this Bill that has been roundly attacked by members of the Government is the mandatory six months' supervisory period at the end of a sentence. How realistic at the moment is parole as supervision? How many offences are committed by prisoners on parole? How realistic are the requirements of parole that have a prisoner reporting once a week or even once a day? How realistic is that supervision? The answer to that can be seen clearly in the number of offences that are committed by people who are actually on parole.

The repeated lament from members on the other side of the House for criminals who have committed the worst crimes is very difficult to understand. There seems to be no consideration at all for the victims. In fact, the basis of the arguments that have been put forward paints the criminals as some sort of victims. No-one begrudges the resources that are going to be necessary to keep serious offenders in jail. It has been pointed out over and over that this should represent no serious increase in the prison population. The community can be justifiably outraged if these criminals are released for budgetary reasons. The nonsense arguments that have been repeated again and again are just that: nonsense.

It is our job in this place to reflect community attitudes. It is not our job to change those attitudes to suit our own agendas. It is not our job to convince the people who elect us that the things that they require from us are the wrong options. The overwhelming view in the community is that harsh penalties should be applied to violent criminals. The overwhelming view in the community is that violent criminals should be severely punished. The overwhelming view is that the victims of violent crime are not well protected and that they are not well served by the present system. The crime prevention strategies must continue. No-one is making the simplistic suggestions to which the Minister for Police alluded,

namely, that this particular piece of legislation would be the be-all and end-all. Of course, it has to work hand in hand with other crime prevention strategies.

The Minister for Police talked at length about the problems of prisoner behaviour. It is very simple, in my view, to refute his argument in its entirety. The option exists to extend the sentence of violent criminals who become intractable and refuse to operate within the rules of the prison community. We do not really need an option to reduce a prisoner's sentence in order to enforce prisoner behaviour.

Mr Barton: You can't increase someone's sentence unless they do something wrong.

Mr SEENEY: That is right; absolutely. That becomes the mechanism for enforcing proper prisoner behaviour. If prisoners do something wrong while they are in prison, the option exists to extend their sentences.

Mr Lucas: If it is not a criminal offence——

Mr SEENEY: Mr Speaker, the member for Lytton continually interjects. As I said, I do not mind turning this into a shouting match at all. I can handle that. But if the member for Lytton is going to continually interject, then you can hardly censor me for the way in which I react to those interjections.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! With respect, if the member answers those interjections then he accepts them. That is the rule of the Parliament. If the member did not answer those interjections and just carried on, then I would warn the member for Lytton for constant interjecting.

Mr SEENEY: I would appreciate it if the same standards were applied to him as are applied to members on this side of the House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Those are the standards that are applied. If you respond to an interjection, you are accepting it. If you do not respond and keep on going, I will stop the member for Lytton interjecting.

A Government member interjected.

Mr SEENEY: I can handle your interjection and I can handle his interjection. I take your interjection when you call me a big sook. That is far from the truth, and you know it.

In conclusion, I would like to lend some support to the member for Caloundra. She spoke about the article in the Townsville Bulletin and referred to the comments that were attributed to the member for Mundingburra. The member for Mundingburra spoke about the inadequacy of a 10-year jail sentence for a man who was found guilty of killing his wife. That 10-year jail sentence is really only a three-year jail sentence when parole conditions are taken into account.

I believe that the comments attributed to the member for Mundingburra which appeared in the Townsville Bulletin of Monday, 22 March 1999 should be read by every member of this House before they vote on this Bill. The member for Mundingburra should remember those comments when she is called upon to vote upon this Bill. There can be no greater example of what this Bill is about. There can be no greater example of the community outrage than the outrage that was felt by the member for Mundingburra in that case.

I will conclude where I began. This Bill reflects the will of the community. This Bill has huge support in the community. It has huge support in every electorate. It has huge support in the member for Bundaberg's electorate, and she knows it. That is why she was so worried about her electorate finding out that she was going to vote against this Bill. Every member opposite knows that there is huge support for this Bill in their electorates. There is huge support for this Bill in my electorate and across the State of Queensland.

It is up to us in this place to respect that community view. It is up to us in this place to respect the community support for this Bill. It is up to us in this place to reflect that support by voting for this Bill.
