



Speech by

LINDA LAVARCH

STATE MEMBER FOR KURWONGBAH

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND PENALTIES AND SENTENCES AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (9.23 p.m.): I rise to oppose this Bill, because I believe that it is a cheap, shallow piece of political rhetoric. There is nothing in this Bill that will enhance community safety or reduce the crime rate.

Let me put some balance back into this debate. I would like to read to members a letter from one of my constituents to Premier Peter Beattie, and I hope that the Leader of the Opposition is listening. It states—

"Dear Premier,

I am writing to you, since the topic involves the interests of several Ministries.

I am deeply concerned at the trends under the previous Government towards reduced support for services designed to prevent the breakdown of family life, and consequent serious social problems such as domestic violence, child abuse and homelessness, often leading to degeneration into crime. My concern is aggravated by the parallel increased emphasis on punishment—more severe sentences and more prisons. Studies have shown that under present prison practices, drugs are readily available and rape of young males is common, with the result that first time inmates are being dehumanised, and made less able to participate in the community. On that basis 'Corrective Services' is a gross misnomer.

Having written to the former Premier"—

who is now the Leader of the Opposition—

"on this subject, I was informed of the existence of a number of Interdepartmental Committees intended to ensure co-operation among the various jurisdictions concerned, e.g. Family and Community Services, Corrective Services, Education and Health. The outcomes outlined above do not inspire much confidence in the process.

Along with a number of our friends, my wife and I are actively involved in non-government agencies struggling to provide services to support those suffering under the stresses and strains of our increasingly fractured society. We are continually frustrated by the inadequacy of resources available, in relation to the needs. The frustration is aggravated by the knowledge that the proposed increased spending on prison construction is only the start, and that each inmate involves a cost of some \$45,000 per year.

I would submit that funds allocated to well targeted and managed programs aimed at preventing breakdowns in society, would be a good investment in purely financial terms, quite apart from the social benefits in enhanced community wellbeing. In other words, I would urge a better balance between preventive/constructive programs, and those dealing with the failures in our social system."

That is what the Labor policy is about. It is about being not only tough on the causes of crime but also being tough on crime.

As a society, we have never really settled the question of why we incarcerate people. There are four reasons that one can point to as to why there is incarceration. Firstly, and probably foremost, it is

punishment, or retribution for the crime. Secondly, there is an expectation that there will be some rehabilitation. Thirdly, it is for community safety that the person is incarcerated for a period so that the community is safe. Fourthly, it is suggested that it should be a deterrence. We know that, in reality, our corrections centres can deliver probably only two of those goals of society. One is retribution and punishment and the other one is time out. There needs to be much more resources allocated to programming for rehabilitation within the prisons. We certainly know that prisons on their own are not a deterrent. The question would certainly be answered that, if prisons were a deterrent, we would have no crime today.

This tough on law and order stance and the auction that has been carried out in Australia over the past decade or so originated in America. The Leader of the Opposition spoke about looking at what happens in other countries. I suggest that he look at what is happening in America now. In 1992, there was a report prepared by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation called America Behind Bars. Even seven years ago it was recognised in that report that with more than one million people in their jails, the United States was spending an estimated \$25 billion a year on the construction of facilities and the management of inmates. It was said in the report that from 1980 through to 1992 the numbers of Americans behind bars increased by almost 106%. Many of their institutions are dangerously overcrowded. Moreover, the statistics show that there is no clear relation between the crime rate and the growth in the number of prisons and prisoners. According to public opinion polls, the majority of Americans are dissatisfied with the criminal justice system. The increase in the number of persons in prisons, the stance of getting tough on crime, policies urging longer prison sentences and the large numbers of offenders being sent to prison have not reduced the instances of crime by any measure.

In that report the authors set out a number of findings from research and public opinion polls. It was found that too often key decision makers create laws and regulations based on what they think the public wants but they fail to ask the public directly for their view. It was found that there was an interesting similarity in findings in a number of public opinion polls conducted over the past decade. Those findings were that the community is not as punitive as legislators believe. The community expectation was, and is, that there be a reduction in crime. The community is looking more to rehabilitation and deterrent factors than retribution factors.

I think we can learn a lot of lessons from the so-called prison industry in America. If we do, perhaps we will not follow the same path. I commend the Beattie Government for looking at the front end of crime prevention and of community safety and for the measures being initiated in relation to crime prevention. We have to put in a lot more effort. The community wants to be safe. People do not necessarily want to be retributive or punitive.

I commend the current crime prevention task force that is operating in the State. I also commend the emphasis on victims of crime. I will be opposing the Bill.
