



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOOMBA SOUTH

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PERFORMANCE OF MINISTERS

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.10 p.m.): I take great pleasure in seconding this motion. Last night, the debate was about the dunces class, and tonight it is about those who are in grave danger of sliding into it. We are witnessing a declining performance of the Beattie Government just 10 months into its term of office. Its Ministers inherited everything in good order, particularly the Minister for Police. With the recruitment system that he inherited, all the hard work had been done, all the systems had been put in place, and the numbers of graduates were increasing. Now we are starting to see a declining performance.

The Police Minister, Mr Barton, likes to tout himself as the Minister who gets his hands on the levers, but what we are seeing increasingly is a Minister with his hands well and truly off the levers. Yesterday in this Parliament, members were talking about police stations in and around Ipswich. The Minister spoke about how there had been an internal review of the position and the status of some seven or eight police stations and Police Beats in the Ipswich area. The Minister admitted that the first he knew about it was when he read the press clippings. Here we have a major review in and around one of the major cities of Queensland, but this Minister—with his hands off the levers—does not know about it; he had to read the press clippings to find out what is happening in his own department.

Earlier this week there was an escape from the Townsville Correctional Centre farm. Two prisoners drove out in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, fully loaded with fuel. Suddenly, in today's Courier-Mail, we have an explanation by Mr Kevin Corcoran. There was no explanation by the Minister. The Minister has his hands off the levers. Just like everything that involves this Beattie Labor Government, there is always a spokesman. When the going gets tough, poor old Tom is nowhere to be seen, and a spokesman comes out and wears the flak.

So what did we hear? Driving out of the prison in four-wheel-drive vehicles is now no longer allowed; they are going to drive out in tractors. I suppose that the warning to the people of Townsville is going to be: if you see a tractor driver going through Townsville, it might not belong to the city council. Just check; it could be prisoners. On Saturday night, we had prisoners going out to the rubbish dump in the dark. If the Minister had his hands on the levers, he would certainly know what was happening.

Where were the levers when it came time to make a decision on a jail at Inglewood, Roma or Yarraman? The Minister got rolled by the Premier. The Minister knows that the best case that was put forward was that for the Yarraman/Nanango area. But in a cynical political decision, the Premier wanted the jail to go to Maryborough alone because he wanted to try to win back that seat from One Nation. So good government went out the window, and the opportunity to spread the economic benefit of three 200-bed jails amongst the City of Maryborough and the districts of Inglewood, Yarraman and Roma was lost. Instead, there will be an additional 400 beds at Woodford. What are we going to end up with at Woodford? It will be the biggest high-security prison in Australia—1,000 beds. Members talk about quality of security and quality of rehabilitation. But how on earth are we going to achieve that with a prison institution as large and as substantial as that?

The proactive support group has been downgraded. That group represented one decent opportunity to create a standard of excellence in how we deal with security, special events and special security occurrences in our prisons. It was an opportunity to deal with the drug issue and to maintain a

group of specialists who could look in from the outside to see what might be happening and, in that way, lift the standards in our prisons. But that group has been disbanded.

What else have we seen? We are seeing the pending appointment of a highly experienced schoolteacher, educational administrator and Director-General of Education as the director-general of prisons. As I said in a speech in Parliament earlier this week, that is like putting a policeman in charge of the Education Department. It makes no sense whatsoever, particularly in relation to something as important as prisons, where we must have people who have a lot of experience in prison management and prison administration. But the Police Minister denies everything. He is not interested.

What about the issue at Ipswich? It was important that the reputation of those police was preserved at all times when the issue of strip searching was raised. We could have had a good, quick, preliminary inquiry into that which would have said, "Things are okay, but it is progressing further to the CJC, just in case." But what happened? The Minister took his hands off the levers, and absolutely nothing happened.

Time expired.
