



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (12.09 p.m.): Today I wish to speak about the prisons system. The longer the current Minister, Mr Barton, is in charge of Corrective Services, the longer the prisons system will be subjected to mismanagement, example after example of which is starting to surface.

Following its review of the Corrective Services system, the Government appointed the director-general. As I have said before in this Parliament, that appointee was a very experienced schoolteacher and educational administrator. However, that person has zero experience in the management of prisons. If any portfolio needs a great depth of experience and knowledge of high security, medium security, staff, community corrections and so forth, it is the Corrective Services portfolio. The vast bulk of the team involved in the review undertaken when the Labor Government came to power has been put into substantive positions in the newly created Department of Corrective Services.

We are now seeing a complete collapse of morale in the department. Decisions are not being made and people cannot find out what is happening. People within the Corrective Services system are now starting to talk about the A Team and the B Team. The A Team consists of the ones who know what is happening and the B Team consists of those who have been appointed and who do not have any experience. One team is saying, "We'll just sit back and wait till all of the problems occur, and this Minister will soon see the folly of his leadership direction in respect of the department." There is no greater example of the sort of bungling occurring under this Minister than the reported budget overrun, which has brought about a rebuke from Treasury. The Minister has been taken to task and has had to look at staff cuts.

We have seen staff cuts in three areas. Firstly, where there are two prisoners to a cell— they are being D-doubled. Naturally, that should have been allowed for. Even though it undertook a recruiting program, the D-doubling program should have allowed for the number of staff coming back into the system and who would have to go into the new prisons that were under construction and were about to be opened—new prisons that had been funded and with their construction being commenced under the previous coalition Government. In addition to this D-doubling, we see a reduction in full-time equivalent staff being effected by a change to the formula. The formula of 2.7 prison officers per post per 12-hour shift has been changed to 2.54. For example, that has brought about a reduction of some 18 officers at Sir David Longland and it is bringing about a reduction in officer numbers at other prisons also.

Probably the cruellest cut of all has been that to the recruits. A large number of recruits have been trained. Upon undertaking a three-month course, they move into the prison system, firstly as temporaries and then as temporary permanents. A number of these recruits have now been sacked. They have nil prospects of finding a job elsewhere within the prisons system. Of the 26 at Sir David Longland, 21 have been told that they will lose their job as of Friday this week. On radio, the Minister said, "No, that's not true. Only five of them will lose their jobs." I was inundated with people contacting me and saying that what I had said was right and that what the Minister said was wrong. Obviously, what I am being told about how the Minister is being managed upwards from below by various people is to the point. He is being told what the bureaucrats want to tell him. Then he rushes onto the airwaves and out it tumbles and, once again, he is wrong.

The truth of the matter is that of those 26 recent recruits at Sir David Longland, 21 were given their marching orders. I understand that five have been able to find work elsewhere, for example, at places such as Palen Creek. In one of the cruellest blows of all, they were given a piece of paper with a contact number for the department so that they could find out about other opportunities. However, when they rang that contact number, they found that the relevant person was away on holidays. A lot of use that was! These are people who have been well trained. In many cases, they have come to Brisbane from other parts of Queensland and have left other jobs in good faith to undergo this training. The Minister has made much in this Parliament about Labor's promise at the last election to provide 50 extra recruits. He is now well on target to sacking more than 50 of those 50 extra recruits that he was going to put on. That demonstrates the Government's lack of planning. At the moment, recruit training programs are still under way. More recruits are being trained while, at the same time, the Minister is sacking those who completed their courses a few months ago.

Absconds and escapes have occurred with ridiculous ease throughout the year. None was more famous than the incident at Townsville, when on a Saturday night a four-wheel-drive Landcruiser that was supposed to be used to take away rubbish was used by prisoners as a means of escape. It had a full tank of fuel and the prisoners were able to access its keys. That is typical of the sort of management flowing down from this Minister. The keys to one of the major jails in Brisbane were stolen by someone on the inside. There were also the motorbike escapes from Lotus Glen. The list goes on and on.

Typical of Labor and this Government is the move to introduce methadone and condoms into prisons. Those in the know recognise that methadone is one of the most dangerous substances that can be introduced into the prisons system. It is an admission that the Government cannot stop drugs going into prisons and that it is not able to treat people properly and get them off drugs. It is bringing into the prisons system a substance that can be traded as a currency within the prison. I understand that where it is being trialled at the moment people are putting up their hands and indicating that they want it when they do not even need it and should not be given it. It introduces a dangerous new currency into the prison system.

However, worse than that, at a recent drug forum on the Darling Downs, a senior bureaucrat from the Corrective Services Department announced that it is the intention of Labor to increase the methadone program and put this substance into all of the prisons in Queensland. Under Labor, in the near future methadone will be available in all of the prisons in this State. In other words, it is going to give up on trying to prevent drugs entering our prisons.

The Minister could not wait to get into Government so that he could go on an overseas visit to Sweden and Amsterdam. Interestingly, before he got on the plane to go to Amsterdam he leaked the Government's proposal for brothels, which put the Premier in a spot of bother for a week or two. The Minister went to Amsterdam to look at how prostitution was managed there. Then he went to Sweden to look at anklets and electronic means of tracking people in community corrections programs. But such a program was right on his doorstep. In South Australia, a program has been operating for a number of years. He could have gone to South Australia and seen how successful its program was and to find out all of the information he needed. But, no, he had to duck away over to Sweden.

Meanwhile, what is happening back on the home front? We have empty cells at Wolston. As at a week ago, at the new prison 120 to 130 cells that are supposed to take the protected prisoners in this State were still empty. Currently, there are protected prisoners at other prisons who have not been transferred to the new prison at Wolston, where they are supposed to be. What is the flow-on effect of this? We have remand prisoners being kept in watch-houses throughout south-eastern Queensland. The backlog is building up. I understand that as at a week ago there were 90 to 100 remand prisoners in the watch-houses of south-eastern Queensland. This incompetent Minister is not able to shift protected prisoners out of existing prisons into the vacant cells at the new prison at Wolston, which would enable the other jails to take these prisoners out of the watch-house system.

Today, we saw the beauty of them all—the BST, the 6% tax on everything new in Corrective Services and Police from this year on. Every new capital item, every new jail, such as the new Maryborough jail, every new piece of plant and equipment will be subject to a 6% tax. How will they offset that? Sell off their jails? I do not think so; more and more jails are needed all of the time. There will be no offsetting for this department. This department is left to pay 6%. How can it find that 6% out of its recurrent budget year after year? It will do so only by reducing staff and security. The Minister has not been able to stand up, fight for his department and demonstrate how this 6% tax on every new capital item and new plant and equipment is dangerous and damaging to his future recurrent budget. The bungling goes on and on.

Time expired.