



Speech by

**Mr ROB MITCHELL**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

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Hansard 24 March 1999

**CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND PENALTIES AND SENTENCES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr MITCHELL** (Charters Towers—NPA) (10.07 p.m.): I have much pleasure in rising to support the Corrective Services and Penalties and Sentences Amendment Bill. If accepted by the Parliament, it would go a long way towards restoring the faith of the public of all areas of Queensland.

This Bill reflects the views of the majority of Queensland—and I think we heard about that from the previous speaker. I hear it said daily all around the electorate that violent criminals should serve 100% of their sentence in custody and not be let back onto our streets. How often do we hear of these people reoffending shortly after they are released from prison or other institutions? People are sick and tired of seeing criminals released back into society well before the completion of their original sentence.

This Bill is intended to send a clear message to potential law breakers and hopefully act as a deterrent to people committing a crime or a felony. It is commonly known that many crimes are being committed and the offenders are snubbing their noses at law enforcement officers because of the current regulations. I feel for the police right across this State. We see their frustration and sometimes their anger about the fact that on many occasions they are putting their lives on the line to make arrests and complete the ever-increasing paperwork only to find that the offenders have been let off by the courts with nothing other than a slap on the wrist. I believe the police have been restricted in doing the job they are trained to do.

Everybody is sick and tired of seeing criminals being let off with a good behaviour bond or community service, which I still believe is and has been a farce, as no-one ever fulfils their requirements under this sort of sentencing. They treat the judicial system as a joke and will continue to do so at all levels unless they are made to serve their sentences regardless of the crime they commit. I do not apologise in any way for supporting the motto: if you do the crime, you do the time. The approaches of the do-gooders do not work. They have been tried for many, many years and have proved a failure. They have been tried and yet the crime rate is continually rising.

I realise that this Bill is aimed at the class of dangerous criminals who should not receive the benefit of early parole or remissions, but I do believe that we have to look at the big picture and ensure a safer living environment for all law-abiding Queenslanders. How often do we hear—especially from the aged people—that people are prisoners in their own homes for fear that these criminals could break into their homes at any time of the day? It is happening everywhere in the State, even in Charters Towers. On many occasions people have come to me in the office or on the street and told me just how frightened they are, even to go out in the streets.

I told the Parliament the other week of an old lady who was found by a visiting friend to have been living on bread and toast for just on a week because she was too frightened to go shopping with money in her pocket for fear of being robbed in the street. How many of our elderly people in Queensland are living in this fear? I want to quote from a couple of clippings from a paper in my area. One article is headed "Lock all doors". That direction actually came from an acting detective sergeant in Charters Towers. He was telling the people, through this article, to lock all doors day and night. This is actually coming from the police—people have to more or less lock themselves away because the police are finding it so hard to apprehend these criminals who are committing crimes against elderly people.

The other article, which appeared in the same week, is headed "Rage over crime wave". That article details how the Charters Towers City councillors and the public are calling for something to be done there. I know it is happening everywhere else, but it just seems to be running rife there.

**Mr Knuth:** It's a disgrace.

**Mr MITCHELL:** It is a disgrace. It is happening all across the State.

Talking about serious crimes, a couple of them occurred in Townsville recently. There was this coloured sort of a character who raped and sodomised a four-year-old Heatley girl and appealed against his sentence. Only last week the court refused him the right of appeal and he will serve his time. The people up there were actually saying, "A few of us would not lose any sleep if the authorities actually threw away the key." That is the way that a lot of people in Queensland are actually thinking. Let us put these people behind bars so that it is safe for the rest of us to actually go about our daily lives. It is happening too regularly.

The other case involves a man in Townsville who received a three-year sentence for killing his wife. I cannot believe that that is true. This is exactly what we are talking about here. These people are committing these crimes and they are not getting much of a sentence. This guy was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for manslaughter with a recommendation to apply for parole in just three years. That is just not right. These guys are going to back on the street.

I can feel for those women who put a condolence notice in the paper for this man's wife. It was signed by well over a hundred ladies and organisations in the Townsville area. An extract from that states—

"For too long the rights of countless women to make choices for themselves and to live fulfilling lives has been undervalued, ignored, disrespected, overridden and finally taken from them. Leaving a relationship should not mean losing your life.

Violence, brutality, and laws that do little to protect the rights of women will no longer be tolerated.

All women have the right to be free from the tyranny of violence and injustice."

No truer words have been spoken. I know that the member for Townsville would have seen that notice. It was signed by well over a hundred ladies.

**Mr Reynolds:** It is not about truth in sentencing. It is actually about males and females being dealt with by the court.

**Mr MITCHELL:** I did not get that, but it was for this man's wife. He can get out on parole in three years for committing a murder, even though it is classed as "manslaughter". I just do not believe that that is right. This is another case in which they should throw the key away for a while. I believe this is just not right. Why should people have to live in fear?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Mickel): Order! Before the member gets into that, can he just assure me that these cases that he is going to quote are not the subject of an appeal before the courts at the moment?

**Mr MITCHELL:** As far as I believe, it has already been done.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** It will aid the Chair enormously if the member generalises.

**Mr MITCHELL:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will. I just wanted to quote those few articles which contained disturbing news in north Queensland, and even in my area. I am sick of putting up with these sorts of things, and I am sure that everybody else is, too. It just seems to be a daily routine that these guys are out there on our streets. These are the people whom we have to rid our streets and malls of, as I have said, before they get to the stage at which they will commit the serious crimes for which this Bill is intended. We all know what has been happening, but how do we fix the problem? Nobody seems to be coming up with any answers.

We all know that we need more police. Every Government has attempted to provide that and I am not blaming anybody here. We have to get more police out there. As I said earlier, I feel for the police, who are trying to do their job of apprehending these people and getting them off our streets. The police need more assistance, mainly through the court process, and that has been discussed many times in this debate. The courts have to actually ensure that these people serve 100% of their sentence. They need to put these people away and have them serve some sort of sentence which will hopefully be a deterrent against them reoffending.

We hear all the time about early intervention. Let us get fair dinkum when considering the form of rehabilitation in the early intervention programs. The punishment needs to fit the crime that they have committed and not just be a slap on the wrist—as I said earlier—and, "Do not be a naughty boy again." That seems to be the case. They put them back on the streets trying to do community work or whatever. It is just not working. They are wandering the streets and continuing with the usual vandalism, etc. If the offence warrants imprisonment, put them in prison.

We have other facilities such as WORC farms, which I reckon is a great program, where we can put some of these people away. I believe that topic is going to be mentioned pretty regularly in the fine defaulting debate shortly. We should make use of the WORC camps in which we can put people who do not deserve prison but do have to serve some sort of a sentence for their crime. For heaven's sake, we have to give them some sort of a sentence under supervised programs so that they are not left to their own devices, treating the system as a joke, which has been the case up till now.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I have perhaps moved away from the thrust of the Bill before the House, but I do honestly believe that, if Governments do not act and get tougher on crimes being committed by minors and juveniles across the State, we will be faced with more of these serious crimes.

In Charters Towers not too long ago a chap broke into a house occupied by an elderly couple. He knocked them around so badly that the fellow received a broken hip and the lady was lacerated around the eyes and head. If these people use just a little bit more force on elderly people, that could become a more serious crime. They are doing this. That is where a lot of people are getting caught, because it starts out as a minor theft but ends up being a serious crime if these criminals are distracted. It does not take much force on elderly people from some of these animals out there for that to turn into a serious crime.

That is what I am saying here: we have to try to get these people at an early stage of life to respect the law—or just have respect. I think that is what has been well and truly lost in society. These young people say that there is nothing to do, and they come up with all those sorts of excuses. For God's sake, they have to have some respect for their elders. I do not know how we are ever going to get back to the situation in which young people respect their elders. It seems to be getting worse. As I say, if we do not start doing something about this in the early stages, this Bill will have to come into force, because there will be an increasing number of crimes against these people, whether they like it or not. I commend the Bill to the House, and I certainly hope that it passes through the House.

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