



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND PENALTIES AND SENTENCES AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (9.13 p.m.): The contribution of the member for Ashgrove epitomises the argument from the Government side. They are always a worthy opposition in that they are always willing to defend their ideological position, and I understand that. They take the soft line on crime. They always have and they always will. Thankfully, I speak from experience. Rightly or wrongly, I have had 10 years' experience in the business of law and order.

Mr Fouras: Do you support zero tolerance?

Mr COOPER: I will come to that. The member had his go. I will have mine, and I intend to take every moment available to me. I will not listen to the honourable member; I have already listened to him. I wish to go on with my contribution.

I will admit freely that when I first came into the Ministry back in 1987 I was a greenhorn in relation to Corrective Services. I had never been inside a jail before. Before I was sworn in, I went into Boggo Road to close the black hole. If members go back a little in time, they might recall that occasion. We had some difficult decisions to make. We had a rotten system in place in 1987, and we recognised it as such. We initiated the Kennedy review to pull apart the prison system and put it back together again. In the 10 years since that time, a lot of very good developments have taken place. I have learned a lot of lessons over that time. I admit freely that I wanted to learn about this area. I learnt also that the moment we go soft on them—the moment we go weak—they win.

Every member in this place has a responsibility to put in place laws that protect society. That is our job. Our job is not to make excuses for the criminals to be able to let them out earlier so that they can commit more crimes. Our job is to protect the people. I make no apologies for that whatsoever. However, that has to be done in a balanced, moderate and sensible way without going overboard. We have to drive that line.

From 1987 through to 1989 I went from the portfolios of prisons to police. Afterwards, I went into the Opposition and then back into Government in the same roles. I found that after 10 years one can get typecast in this job. I felt that it was far better to move on to something else. I think my 10-year contribution was worth while. I will not back away from anything that we did in that time. However, we can always learn from experience.

The member for Bundaberg said that she believed people who commit serious violent crimes against the person should be put away. That is exactly what this legislation is saying.

Mrs Nita Cunningham interjected.

Mr COOPER: It is saying that people should be put away for committing serious violent crimes against the person. That is exactly what we are on about. Truth in sentencing is not applicable across-the-board to every single person. That is the difference between us. I agree with the honourable member; I think this is just for those offenders who commit serious violent crimes against the person. Those are the offenders from whom people want to be protected. I could not agree with the member more. The major difference is that when we left office in 1989 we had what we called mandatory life sentences for big drug pushers. The courts put 19 offenders away in jail for serious drug pushing, and in 1990 and 1991 you let them all out—all except Hector Hapeta.

Mr Fouras interjected.

Mr COOPER: I am not referring to you; I am referring to your party and your ideology. You let them out; you turned them loose——

Mr Fouras interjected.

Mr COOPER: You did. The record shows that clearly. That is the difference between the two Governments. You let them out; we put them away. You abolished mandatory life sentences. If you want an example of the difference between the two Governments, I point out that you supported letting them back out into society to push drugs on our kids, and you should be absolutely condemned for it. You cannot——

Mr FOURAS: I rise to a point of order. The member for Crows Nest has misrepresented my position. I am personally offended by it. I ask him why he did not reintroduce mandatory sentences for crimes.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Nelson-Carr): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr Fouras: Why didn't you bring it back in again when you won last time?

Mr COOPER: For a former Speaker, the honourable member shows an appalling lack of knowledge of the rules of this House. I did not say "you", I said you were part of it. Your Government let them all out. That was the difference between the two Governments. We wanted to do something about putting the big pushers away, not the little fellow on the street who was using it. There is always someone who is going to make a quid out of this. They do not care if they kill people. We put them away for life and you let them out. That is the stark difference between the two Governments.

I would rather move on to something else, because I want to go through a lot of the things which we did over time and which still stand the test of time. The Minister for Police and Corrective Services now knows that I am right. We have a very strong belief in what we are doing. Unfortunately, he is ruled by the ideology of members opposite. I will come to that in a moment.

I just want to touch briefly on some practical examples. I have enjoyed every bit of the experiences I have had; I know that we have made a mark and that others will have to follow in our footsteps. Punishment for juvenile crime concerns most Queenslanders. I have examples from towns in my electorate, and many other members, especially those who live up in the bush, would want to talk about similar examples themselves. At the moment, for instance, we have a spate of juvenile crime in Oakey. A number of people who work in or own shops have come to me for advice and assistance, especially in the town of Oakey, which has a shopping centre called Kerrytown and another one called the Tucker Box. These people have made complaints about juveniles constantly breaking and entering their shops and shoplifting from them in broad daylight.

Ms Struthers: These kids haven't got jobs.

Mr COOPER: The member mentions that they do not have jobs, but does that automatically mean that they should just go and commit crimes? I know exactly what she is saying. The member for Archerfield is on the record as saying that, if young people do not have jobs, they should go out and commit crimes. I happen to disagree, and so do the people of Oakey, because they are sick and tired of these brats—these uncontrollable juveniles of 15 and 16 years of age—robbing people blind. Honourable members will hear it all around the State. People are sick and tired of these brats—these juveniles—whose parents should control them but who obviously do not, going out there and doing exactly what they like. Members of Parliament are sick of it. The people are sick of it. After talking to the legal section of the police department, they are sick, too, that there does not seem to be much they can do under the law. Even citizen's arrests are in doubt because police are not sure whether members of the community can go out and make a citizen's arrest.

Juveniles will go out and pinch anything they like off the shelves, walk out the door, give the staff the "two to the Valley" sign and say, "see you later", and out they go. Shopowners and their employees ask, "What can we do?" Some police say, "There is nothing we can do." Rubbish! There is always something people can do. The first thing they should do is ring the police. The second thing they should do—and they are allowed to do this—is follow them. The third thing is that they can take photos of them. If they know them and can describe them to the police, that is the action they should take. That is the action I recommend to people; otherwise it is going to turn nasty. The community has had enough.

John Wilson of Kerrytown and Terry Campbell of Tucker Box are two classic examples of what is happening all around the State. Honourable members must be hearing of those experiences. If they are not, they have not been living in the real world. It is happening all the time. That is the sort of thing that people are sick and tired of. I do not want to see things get out of control. I do not want to see the time come that people take the law into their own hands because, if they do, it is going to get really nasty. We must support our police out in the community. We have given them pretty extensive powers to be able to do their job.

As has been said here before, magistrates have a job to do and some do it, but others are pathetic. Some are even more pathetic in their treatment of juveniles; some keep turning them back onto the streets. Honourable members hear it every day: the police are constantly arresting and charging juveniles but the magistrates let them out. The juveniles commit further offences. After about five or six times, a magistrate might end up putting them into the John Oxley centre or the Sir Leslie Wilson centre where they belong. By the time they get there, they are so tough and hardened that it is very difficult for them to change. All of us must start doing something about these juveniles at a much, much earlier age. It starts with parenting. It starts from the day they are born.

I also want to say that about 98% of kids are good kids; they are tops and we can be proud of them. It is the only 1% or 2% who set that bad example. They are the ones who are causing a heck of a lot of trouble, angst and anxiety out there in the community. We must band together to stop them making it worse for everyone else. Surely the member for Ashgrove has had some experience of this. I cannot understand him pontificating all the time in here on the side of the crim, saying that things must be easier for them.

Mr FOURAS: I rise to a point of order. I find that remark offensive. I am not on the side of the crim all the time, and I ask the member to withdraw that. It is just a joke.

Mr COOPER: I will withdraw it.

As far as truth in sentencing is concerned, we started at 50% of sentence; we moved to 80%. We are fully aware of the fact that that will cause overcrowding in jails. We know that and we made allowances for that. That provision is not retrospective. The next move is to go 100%, and most of the people out there in the community agree with that. There is no question about it; the Government can put them to the test any time it likes. During the 28 months that we were in Government, we put 2,000 extra criminals off the street into the prison system to protect society. That is exactly what our job is—to protect society—not to put all this emphasis on them going back—

Ms Struthers: What about money?

Mr COOPER: The member talks about money. I point out that in the last Budget the coalition increased the Corrective Services budget by 45% and the Capital Works Program by 113%. The Police budget went up 8%, 9% and 10% in the three years we were in Government. They were massive rises— massive increases in numbers—in order to protect society. That is what we were doing. They have never before had that much money. The main thing is to make sure it is spent properly.

The member for Ashgrove also ridicules zero tolerance. I would not ridicule it; I would look at the experiences in other places, such as in New York in the United States. Those people have had a darned sight more experience than we have. It is better to listen to them and learn the tactics they use. I do not agree with John Howard on a lot of things, but at least he had an open mind to look at other ways and means of handling crime. As far as handling crime is concerned, zero tolerance should not be thrown out.

Mr Foley: Do you agree with him on the GST?

Mr COOPER: I know that the Attorney-General is in the same mould of being soft on crime. I think that is unfortunate.

The sad part is that responsibility for juvenile detention centres has gone back to the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care after we put it into the Corrective Services area. We believe that there was a lot more discipline and strength there, and it should have stayed there. Members opposite should go back to Anne Warner, back when Westbrook blew up when the riot was on. We converted that facility to an adult Corrective Services institution. It has worked extremely well ever since. Because it was so weak, in one year 109 people escaped from the John Oxley centre. There was a revolving door with a zebra crossing outside carrying the sign "Prisoners Cross Here". They were escaping all the time. Now this Government has gone back to that. That is the tragedy of it. It is the old Socialist Left—the loony Left—looking after the young crim. That is what we think is so sad.

I just want to go through some of the balanced approach that we took. We recognised that crime prevention has to be a massive part of the equation. We put those initiatives into place. We started off with the crime prevention partnerships. They were new and they should be encouraged. I do not want to see the people opposite abandon those. They must work them. They must cultivate them. They must make them work by getting the community involved in crime prevention. The people in the community know better than we do about crime prevention in their own areas. We started off those partnerships and we had started to expand them.

The school-based constables is another one. It is a brilliant scheme and is working extremely well; members opposite can ask any person in the P & Cs, the school teachers or the kids. The police themselves know that they are good, sensible, strong anti-crime measures that must be continued. We did so much for the Neighbourhood Watch Program. They can fall very flat sometimes. They need

rejuvenating from time to time. Those programs cannot just cruise along every year and not be revamped to some extent.

We knew also that we needed to have a revamped Queensland Police Service. We appointed Sir Max Bingham to look into the service. He produced 197 recommendations to revamp the Queensland Police Service. Nearly every one of those recommendations was implemented while we were there in order to make sure that the Queensland Police Service had all the up-to-date technology that it needed. We brought about the police renaissance—which I think the Government has dropped, which is a pity—to increase their training in technology so that they have and are fully au fait with all the tools to do the job.

We introduced the police powers legislation. Talking about community consultation, we went around the State consulting on the Police Powers and Responsibilities Bill. We went to at least 10 major centres. We took the Opposition spokesman and the civil libertarians. We took every single person who wanted to be there to get an understanding of what the people were saying. In the end, we all agreed with all of the police powers that we put in. Every single one of them is now in place today. The police were waiting since 1982 for those powers, and they got them so that they were able to do the job, which is what we want them to be able to do. There are monitors there. We know that. The Public Interest Monitor is there to make sure that police do not go overboard. We do not want to see that. Either way, I have always said everything must be done in moderation, but the moderation has to be in favour of the community. Honourable members should not forget that they are the people we are trying to protect in the long run.

A big issue was parent education, particularly in relation to drugs, because a lot of parents would not know whether their kids are on drugs. I would not. I would not be able to tell whether or not they were on drugs. A lot of people simply do not know. Parents need education so that if they are, they can do something about it. Parents would love to do that, if only they knew. That coalition initiative was on the board. I think the Labor Party has bushed that initiative as well, which is tragic. Those are the sorts of things we need. We need massive education about drugs, as to what is right and wrong. If we only put those things into play, I am certain we could do a lot better than we are.

What worries me so much—I can see it plainly, even though I have left the portfolio; I know it through all the experiences I have had—is that we are going back to the past. It worries me deeply because we will have to start all over again. If we go back to being soft on crime we will get more crime. I think that is absolutely tragic.

I have talked about police numbers. The Borbidge Government increased police numbers and the Labor Government is maintaining them. We will keep an eye on the Government to make sure it maintains those numbers. I believe the establishment of the Crime Commission was absolutely necessary in order to deal with the issue of paedophilia and major incidences of crime and so that police have the powers to be able to do their job. A lot was done in the area of senior citizens. Our aged people are always a target. We need to have in place something to protect them and make their lives at least reasonable.

As I said, I think crime is caused by a minority—I think we know that—but we should not turn a blind eye to crime and go back to saying that we will look after people in jail by saying that they must have parole. I think a lot of rehabilitation has to be undertaken whilst offenders are in jail. While they are in jail they are where they need to be in order to address the problems they have. We are talking about those who are involved in serious violent crime. I cannot see how or why anyone would want to oppose that. We are not talking about normal, run-of-the-mill crime, which is bad enough. We have to put serious violent offenders away and protect our society. That is what people want.

I will mention briefly school-based constables and crime prevention partnerships. I think those are the two things that will do an enormous amount as far as our students are concerned. We have talked about parent education, which is vital, and about our kids and our teachers. Those things are working well. I have heard rumours coming from the Government side that it is going to start bushing and downgrading crime prevention partnerships, but they are the way to go. The whole community becomes involved. They involve society. Local people know their own patch, be it Oakey, Logan or anywhere else. They know where things are worst and they have ideas and initiatives that can make a difference to crime in their areas.

Time expired.
