



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 16 November 2000

PROPERTY CRIME

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.01 p.m.): I move—

"That this House condemns the Minister for Police for his failure to stop the increasing rate of property crime which now strikes one in twelve Queenslanders each year."

The responsibility for crime statistics in this State rests solely on the shoulders of the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and the Beattie Labor Government. The Minister for Police is the one responsible for Police budgets. He is the one responsible for staff. Most importantly, he is the one responsible for the planned policy direction that the Police Service is to take. The last financial year saw an 8% increase in property crime. The year before saw a 5% increase in property crime. Property crime affects people in this State most of all. If members ask their constituents what they are worried about, they will say that they are worried about the security of their home, the security of their business and the security of their car. They do not want people breaking into their house and stealing their possessions.

Mr Reynolds: Have a little bit of Christmas spirit.

Mr HORAN: The member for Townsville wants a bit of Christmas spirit. If there is ever a time when people are frightened about the occurrence of property crime, it is over the Christmas holiday period. People do not want their Christmas or new year ruined by having their house broken into. They want continuing security for their home.

What have we seen, then, from this Police Minister? In the last financial year, 114 recruits were cut from the recruiting program. Wouldn't it be handy if they had graduated and were out there doing some patrolling, preventing crime or relieving the pressure on those more experienced police who could be out there catching the criminals? We saw a pitiful Police budget in the year 1999-2000. The Police Service was hamstrung throughout the year. Is it any wonder that the property crime statistics are up by 8% when the police did not have the financial resources or the political policy direction from the Minister for Police which could have helped to reduce those statistics?

It is little wonder that these statistics have shown an increase, because the Beattie Government is a rudderless ship. It is a ship that was launched in a sea of corruption, cheating, factional deals and jobs for mates, and the jobs for mates extend to who gets a Cabinet position. It does not matter if you are a dud; you get the job because you have factional support. The jobs for mates extend to who works in the ministerial offices and who gets which jobs. Even if you do not want a particular job you have to take it because some other deal has been done. That is the level of cheating, corruption and rorting that exists in this Government.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will stick to the motion.

Mr HORAN: So it is no wonder that the performance of the Minister has been pathetic; Government members have other things on their minds. One of the Minister's staff walked the plank when the Shepherdson inquiry was announced. The Minister's mind is not on the job of addressing crime statistics, meeting with the police and providing policy direction, ensuring police have adequate resources and ensuring that rising crime rates, particularly property crime rates, are addressed.

Instead of saying, "We have a problem here. How can we address it in a practical way? How can we bring about some improvement for the people of Queensland?", all the Minister does is attack anybody who seeks to lay before the Parliament the stark facts that are in black and white in the annual police report and the annual statistical review, which were tabled in this Parliament for the scrutiny of the

public and the press just this week. As soon as anyone says, "This is a problem", the Minister says, "Oh, you are attacking the police." He does not have the courage to say, "Yes, it is my responsibility. I am doing something about it. I am going to do something about it." Instead, anyone who makes a criticism or points out that property crime rates are increasing is accused of attacking the police and of being a dreadful person.

The police are pleased to see that someone is standing up for them. They are pleased to see that someone is fighting for a decent budget, a bit of policy direction, a bit of leadership and some organisational direction from the Minister regarding which specific areas have to be targeted so that they can get on with the job and be given the finances and resources they need. All we get from the Minister regarding property crime is a pathetic excuse that there has been a 20% increase in the number of offences relating to the handling of stolen goods. That accounted for 1/300th of all the property crimes committed in the past financial year.

Let us examine in some detail the problem that we are facing. Property crime includes unlawful entry—and that is what really upsets people—arson, other property damage, motor vehicle theft, other theft, fraud and handling stolen goods. It is the unlawful entry into people's homes and people's businesses that is upsetting so many Queenslanders. In the last financial year, property crime in Queensland increased sharply—by 8%. A grand total of 303,105 cases were reported to police. The year before, 281,532 cases of property crime were reported. That figure was an increase of 5% on the year before that. So there was a 5% increase, and now there has been an 8% increase.

How many people are affected? As stated in the report tabled in Parliament, 1 in 12 Queenslanders are affected by a reported property offence. Members can understand the concern that people have about property offences. People want to see the Government of the day do something about it. The clear-up rate for property crime is 25%. This means that in the last financial year about 75,796 property crimes were solved out of the 303,105 reported, and a backlog of 11,800 offences from previous periods was cleared. Seventy-eight per cent of property crime offenders were male. Nearly one third of offenders were males aged between 15 and 19 years. These figures are fairly consistent with those of the year before. I also note that of the total number of persons accused of property crimes 46% were arrested, 40% were served with a court notice and 12% were cautioned. Two per cent were unaccounted for.

Property crimes in metropolitan areas have increased significantly. In north Brisbane they increased by 18%; in south Brisbane they increased by 15%. In the Metropolitan South region, notwithstanding the significant increase in property crime, there was a reduction of six police officers, according to the official police report tabled in Parliament. In the regional breakdown, there have been increases in property crime of 11% in the Central region, 6% in the Northern region, 5% in the Southern region, 3% in the South Eastern region, 3% in the North Coast region, and minus 7%—a decline—in the Far Northern region, for which we should give credit because it is certainly a good result.

When Mr Barton had to talk about the crime statistics when that report came out, what did he say? He said that the latest crime figures were particularly pleasing. I do not think they were pleasing to those 303,000-odd victims of property crime. But to give credit where it is due, there was a reduction of 2% across the State in the number of crimes against the person. We appreciate that and give credit where it is due. But I reiterate: property crime is what is on everybody's mind. It went up by 8% last year and 5% the year before.

It is interesting to note that the Sunday Mail survey Your State, Your Say conducted during October revealed that of the 12,000 respondents surveyed one in five did not feel safe in their homes some or all of the time. There is some hard data, some hard statistics. It really goes to show the concern that people have. The other issue is the link between property crime and drug crime. Unless something is done about the drug situation, there will not be any decrease in the property crime rate.

In conclusion I say that whilst these figures are alarming—and the fact that they are increasing consistently is also alarming—the coalition will bring about some policies that will give the people of Queensland a real alternative, because we will have policies that will address the causes of the crime. I mentioned some of the problems such as the high level of property crime that is caused by youth. We are going to have in place some very real and practical programs that will assist youth to resist getting involved in crime so that it does not have further consequences for them later in life. One of those will be the Life Be In It campaign. The Beattie Government savagely cut the funding for that scheme.

Importantly for the Queensland Police Service, our policies will be specific, they will be targeted, they will be practical and they will enable the Queensland Police Service in a very active and positive way to be able to get out and attack crime. The sort of policy direction that we will give will be quite the opposite to the lack of policy direction that is provided by the present Police Minister, who is drowning in the corruption and cheating scandal that the Beattie Labor Government is stumbling through at the moment and which has caused it to close down Parliament for December.

What the public will see from this coalition is a plan that will work and protect their houses and their small businesses.

Time expired.
