



Speech by

Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard Wednesday, 4 August 2010

CRIMINAL CODE (SERIOUS ASSAULTS ON POLICE AND PARTICULAR OTHER PERSONS) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (8.59 pm): I am very happy to rise this evening and add my support to the Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill before the House on behalf of the Kawana electorate. May I premise my remarks by answering one of the issues raised by the honourable the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General raised the issue of how can it be just to give young people, first-time offenders and second-time offenders a mandatory three-month jail sentence? I throw that back to the Attorney on behalf of all the police officers, fires and ambulance officers. How can it be just that they get spat on every night? How can it be just to be assaulted like that?

The Attorney can only think of the poor person who has perpetrated that violence against the officer. That is what is at the forefront of the Attorney's mind—not the victim but the perpetrator. He thinks, 'Because they are a first-time offender, let us encourage them, let us cuddle them, let us put them back in society so they can go to the CBD next Friday night and do it all over again.' That is why this bill should be supported. I look forward to the member for Chatsworth crossing the floor tonight because he is an ex-firey and he will understand firsthand why this bill needs to pass this place tonight.

The Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill was introduced by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. From the outset, I would like to place on the record my support for the shadow Attorney-General's bill which provides further protection to the good men and women working for our state police, ambulance, fire and rural fire offices. I am confident that the introduction of a minimum sentence range for serious assaults that involve bodily harm, biting or spitting on emergency services personnel will act as a stronger deterrent to those in our community who have little respect for our emergency services personnel and the invaluable service they provide to our communities.

Unfortunately, there is an increasing societal trend where people think it is okay to assault emergency services personnel, and the numbers speak for themselves. In 2007, there were 429 offenders who were convicted of serious assaults against police officers. The bill before the House seeks a minimum sentencing range of three months imprisonment for all serious assaults on police where the assault involves biting, spitting or throwing bodily fluid or faeces. Between December 2008 and June 2009, police officers made 155 WorkCover claims for assaults against them, and in 72 of those cases the officer was exposed to blood or bodily fluid. In 2007-08, 38 assaults were made against ambulance officers and this jumped to 107 in 2008-09. In 2009-10, the number is continuing to escalate and evidently is spiralling out of control. Honourable members, this is not good enough. Our emergency services personnel deserve to have the right to personal safety and protection in the workplace.

It is the height of hypocrisy for Labor Party members to oppose this measure, given that they regard themselves as the workers' party—except when it comes to police, who were recently insulted with the pay rise offer that was put forward by this Labor government; or our doctors and nurses who cannot even be paid correctly, if at all; or our miners, who were sold out to Rudd and 'Fake Gillard' at the time with the introduction of the great big new tax on mining; or our teachers last year who had to strike twice before they could get a decent pay rise offered. Then there is the WorkCover scheme which is in place to

compensate workers who are injured in the workplace which this government managed to bankrupt before it was resurrected earlier this year.

It seems to me that the longer the Bligh Labor government is in office the more and more it marginalises the hundreds of thousands of workers from the many industries all over this great state which it claims to represent. While Labor members continue to state that they are for jobs and jobs growth in Queensland, they are all talk and no action. What the people of Queensland are crying out for is real action.

It is no surprise that it requires the LNP opposition to stand up for our emergency services personnel and restore some order in our system, because the Bligh Labor government has adopted the softly, softly approach and it is quite clear that this approach has not worked. It was the same in Western Australia, where the Liberal government had to restore order on the streets. Stronger measures need to be implemented in Queensland as a measure of protection for our police, ambulance, fire and rural fire officers.

Only last weekend, a police officer was assaulted while pulling a motorist over for a random breath test on the Sunshine Motorway, which is on the border of my electorate. Details of the incident were reported in the *Sunshine Coast Daily* on 1 August 2010 and the article read as follows:

A DRUNK driver struck a police officer in the face after driving on the Sunshine Motorway while more than four times the legal blood alcohol limit, police said.

The 36-year-old Mountain Creek man was pulled over by a patrol unit at Mooloolaba about 4.20am yesterday.

The man allegedly gave a positive blood alcohol roadside test before returning a 0.219% BAC at Maroochydore Police Station.

Maroochydore police duty sergeant Bill Morris said the motorist was being escorted to the watchhouse with two male officers when he began to struggle.

He said one of the policemen was allegedly slapped in the face by the man in custody.

Sgt Morris said the officer suffered no serious injuries.

The man will appear in Maroochydore Magistrates Court on August 25 charged with assaulting police and driving under the influence.

A second man will also appear in court after driving 0.134% BAC.

Sgt Morris said police would continue to enforce the law against drink drivers.

"People who choose to enjoy several drinks should ensure they do not need to get behind the wheel to make the journey home," he said.

This was not a serious assault but it highlights a certain lack of authority that is increasingly evident in society and it also emphasises the fact that when people are under the influence of either alcohol or illicit drugs they have very little control over their actions.

The legislation before the House does not focus on incarceration as the answer, but it is certainly a far more powerful deterrent and measure that can protect our police officers while they are serving to uphold the law in this state. For far too long the police have been neglected by this Labor government, and this is a proactive measure that sets the balance right in terms of the punishment befitting the crime. The slap on the wrist approach to sentencing by the Bligh Labor government sends out the wrong message to those who intend to live outside the laws which ensure that order is maintained. It sends the wrong message to the majority of residents who do the right thing and should feel safe in their homes and on our streets. Our emergency services personnel deserve the right to be protected while at work. The introduction of a minimum mandatory sentence will be a much stronger proactive matter than what is offered by the Bligh Labor government.

Earlier this year, I participated with other honourable members in the Law, Justice and Safety Committee's inquiry on alcohol related violence. We toured the state and I can tell the House that what I saw out on the streets when we were touring nightclub districts all around Queensland was appalling. There were thousands of young Queenslanders lining the streets with rubbish, assaulting police officers, having no regard to what the police are there for, having no regard to their fellow Queenslanders. There was absolute garbage on the street, absolute mess and mayhem. At the forefront of our protection and the ones who have to clean up the mess are our police and emergency services personnel, and they should not have to put up with that. It is unacceptable.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the work of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for the introduction of the bill and I remind the people of Queensland that the LNP is the party that has a long tradition of maintaining law and order across the state and it is the LNP that will restore public faith in the justice system. Those grubs in our society who choose to assault our police and ambulance workers deserve to be thrown in jail. They do not deserve, as the Attorney thinks, to be given a slap on the wrist and a cuddle by the Bligh Labor government and to be told, 'It's okay. You can spit on the police officer on a Friday night and because it's your first offence we'll let you off, but we'll see you again next Saturday night.' It is unacceptable. These people deserve to have the book thrown at them, not just a slap on the wrist. Under an LNP government, this will happen. Under the Labor government, our emergency services workers will be continually neglected by a government that does not deserve to be here. I commend the honourable shadow Attorney-General's bill to the House.