

Ms Sheila McHale; Mr Jim McGinty; Ms Diana Warnock; Ms Megan Anwyl; Mr Ian Osborne; Mr Alan Carpenter; Mr John Kobelke; ;); Mr Bob Bloffwitch; Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs June van de Klashorst; Mr Clive Brown; Mr Fred Riebeling; Mr Colin Barnett

I turn briefly to another subject which concerns policing about which I have spoken many times before; that is, the problem of crime and anti-social behaviour in Northbridge. It is clear that many of the traders there, let alone the visitors who come into that entertainment area, are dissatisfied with the behaviour of some people who hang about there - not everybody, quite clearly, but a sizeable minority - who disturb people who go about their lawful business or who visit Northbridge to enjoy themselves. Some people are actually afraid to visit Northbridge, not only because of the sensational coverage in the local papers, but also because they have formed the impression over time that it is an unsafe area to enter. I find that both depressing and reprehensible because it means that the resources that have been needed in that area for some time have not been provided by the Government. If it is not the Government's responsibility to provide them, I do not know whose responsibility it is.

I have frequently spoken to senior police officers, as I attend many community safety meetings and so on. Most members of Parliament in the course of their workday activities would speak to many police. I have spoken to a number of senior police officers about this issue and they assure me that the precinct I am speaking about - the Northbridge area - is very well policed. Some police have told me that it is the best policed area in Western Australia. They are loyal public servants and I would not expect them to say anything else. However, it is clear from regular complaints from traders in the area and regular stories in the local papers that the situation is unsatisfactory and that this so-called tough-on-crime Government has simply not provided the much-needed resources and leadership. I do not for a moment suggest that daily operational matters are the responsibility of a Government; they are the responsibility of the Police Force. However, if the resources and the leadership are not there, clearly the job will not be done properly.

I believe many of the traders in Northbridge would obviously be Liberal supporters rather than Labor supporters. However, it has certainly not stopped them taking a very tough stand on crime and anti-social behaviour in the city. They are not happy and my impression is that they intend to convey that view to the Government in no uncertain terms. I have mentioned this matter many times previously in this House. Before I sit down I would like to draw attention to a recent story in *The West Australian* of 2 August which refers to a street war between young gangs. As a former journalist, I can understand the reason for this coverage. In some ways as a member of Parliament I regret it as it perhaps gives a wrong impression of life on our streets in Western Australia. Nonetheless, it reminds me, as somebody who has been concerned about the policing of this area for some time, that the Asian police squad, which was formed several years ago to work underground and to deal in a background way with this kind of activity and prevent it happening, has been disbanded or its resources scattered here or there. I hope that the squad will be reformed as I am sure the fact that it has been disbanded is something about which the Asian community and the possible victims of these street wars will be extremely unhappy.

I therefore call on the Government to increase the resources to police and to take seriously its responsibility, which it assured us it would when it was elected in 1993, for being tough on crime and to properly resource our Police Service.

MS ANWYL (Kalgoorlie) [3.28 pm]: I shall make some comments in relation to this amendment, specifically the aspect of police corruption which some esteemed members of our community believe to be a problem. I am always interested when I hear the Minister for Police say that it is only a fairly notorious criminal and the Opposition who are calling for a royal commission. However, today's media statements have been made by the chairman of the standing committee which oversees the activities of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Hon Derrick Tomlinson, who presented to this Parliament some years ago, I think in 1996, a report which detailed very gross breaches of proper activities by police. When someone like that says that a royal commission into police corruption is inevitable, the police minister should upgrade his rhetoric, as many senior and leading members of the Western Australian community have made statements about the problem of police corruption.

That is not to say that any member of the Opposition is critical of the Police Service as a whole. We all have a great deal of esteem for the dedication shown by police officers. I have great regard for the difficult job they do. Often they carry out the extremely difficult duties that other government agencies will not. All police officers, particularly those who have been in the service for a long time, can reel off anecdotes about the areas in which they have had to work, whether it be attending rather messy suicides, dealing with bereaved families or coping with child welfare issues. Police officers have a difficult job. It is those police officers who work so hard that have their integrity impugned by the actions of a few. Therefore, it is necessary that we get to the bottom of what is happening in Western Australia.

I have no trouble admitting that I am a Victorian. I came to this State to work in the legal profession almost 20 years ago. At that time, the view was that Western Australia was somehow quarantined from the type of organised corruption that occurred in other States. This view is still prevalent, especially with organised paedophilia. The perception is that Western Australia is somehow different and does not have the same problems as do many other States. I have never understood that philosophy. I understand people are parochially

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proud of the achievements of this State; however, it is naive of them to wear blinkers and assume that Western Australia is not exposed to the same types of corruption as are other States. It is necessary to work out an effective framework to get to the bottom of these matters.

The Anti-Corruption Commission has created some real problems. It is a secret commission. Presumably some members of Parliament have some knowledge of what is occurring, especially Hon Derrick Tomlinson, who says that a royal commission is inevitable. Some members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Anti-Corruption Commission would know what goes on, but I and many other members of Parliament do not. The view of the legal profession, with which I still have involvement, is that the fact that so few charges are successful and so few disciplinary charges - let alone criminal charges - are laid by the commission does not augur well for its success. I do not believe that the answer is to increase its powers, which is what I think the commission and its chairman will call for. Some of the chairman's statements border on being overzealous. His comments about detectives and long lunches brought discredit to the Police Service. For someone like Mr O'Connor to make those statements indicates that another agenda is afoot.

The Government is hell-bent on holding a law and order debate. We know the Government does not want to talk about health, education, crime prevention or any of the other areas at which it has failed so badly; however, it has looked at the polling and has decided it could do well with law and order. The debate this Parliament will have on the Criminal Property Confiscation Bill will be a farce. The Bill will introduce some incredibly strong powers for non-conviction-based forfeiture, which is fine. I was a member of the Select Committee on the Misuse of Drugs Act 1981, which recommended those laws in 1997. Recommendation 40 of the interim report said that non-conviction-based forfeiture legislation should be introduced for drug trafficking. I signed my name to most of the recommendations in the final report, which was tabled in August 1998. Recommendation 38 of that report asked the Attorney General to rush through non-conviction-based forfeiture laws for drug trafficking. It is now two years after the committee's final report and two and a half years after the interim report. The committee, on a bipartisan basis, specifically requested that those things occur. Members of this Parliament will need to think again if they believe that meaningful non-conviction-based forfeiture legislation can be introduced when the Police Service is corrupt, particularly in the area of organised crime; that is, drug trafficking and prostitution.

It is worth revisiting the November 1997 and August 1998 reports of the Select Committee on the Misuse of Drugs Act 1981, in which it made some lengthy recommendations about the powers and resources required by police. The Western Australia Police Service does not have sufficient undercover police officers or the appropriate expertise in law and accountancy accountability. Those factors are vital in eradicating the types of organised crime about which we are talking. Western Australia does not undertake sophisticated operations. One of the key issues raised by Operation Red Emperor is that, to a large degree, the criminals have better resourcing and technology than the Police Service, which is of major concern. One of the main questions asked by the community is why organised criminals are so far ahead of the Police Service all the time. There are two answers to that, and one relates specifically to police corruption. If members of Parliament are not yet aware that a large numbers of tip-offs are made to the Mr Bigs of organised crime and that there is a lack of resources and willingness to apprehend those criminals, it is about time they woke up. It would be a sheer nonsense to pass the Criminal Property Confiscation Bill when corrupt police tip off the very criminals the public wants caught about the types of operations to which the Bill refers. It is important to note that New South Wales, which has had some success in this area, has established a Police Integrity Commission that is accountable to the Parliament and has a clearly defined policy of employing police officers from outside its jurisdiction. Those are vital elements of an effective anti-corruption mechanism. Western Australia has not gone down that path and is experiencing major problems. Strengthening the powers of the Anti-Corruption Commission is not the solution. The Anti-Corruption Commission has been a dramatic and expensive failure. A proper debate is needed about what the Anti-Corruption Commission is trying to achieve.

Based on the needle and syringe statistics, my electorate of Kalgoorlie has a higher-than-state-average level of drug use and much dealing in illicit drugs. The police do not seem to have the power, will or resources to deal with the problem. The number of drug-related apprehensions and convictions has fallen, despite clear evidence that illicit drug use is increasing. The resourcing issue is pertinent to Kalgoorlie-Boulder. When the police have utilised undercover operations, people have been caught. However, if undercover operations are not used, the ability of the Police Service to infiltrate organised crime is minimal. There were no bikie gangs in Kalgoorlie-Boulder when I became the member for Kalgoorlie in 1996. Two chapters of organised, criminal, outlaw motorcycle gangs, as they are known, have since established themselves in the area. That situation is replicated across the regional areas of Western Australia. There is a great deal of consternation among those who live in the regional areas of Western Australia where this has occurred. I suggest that the lack of police resourcing has directly contributed to the ability of those outlaw motorcycle gangs to establish a presence in country areas.

Extract from Hansard
[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 9 August 2000]
p110c-141a

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Anyone who lives in a country area knows that the visibility of particular members of the community is high. It is harder to hide when one is living in a small country area, yet these gangs appear to flourish.

As to police resourcing, one of the key issues of the Delta reforms announced in 1996 was to make the Police Service more accountable and more responsive to community needs. For that reason, a great deal of encouragement and support was given to the Police Service decision to locate a commander in the city of Kalgoorlie-Boulder. The recent decision by the commissioner was to abolish the whole central region, where the commander was based in Kalgoorlie, and to merge it with the largest police area in the world, the northern region, where the commander was based in Port Hedland. The merging of those two regions resulted in an area of 2.39 million square kilometres, to be serviced by one new commander. Guess where that commander lives. Of course, the new commander lives in Perth, and that will really help him get insight into the needs of regional centres and their communities.

The decision to amalgamate those regions is really an admission of failure by the Police Service. The 1996 Delta rhetoric was about being responsive, yet in a letter from the commissioner to me dated 4 August the commissioner states –

The changes are consistent with the “Delta” philosophy, which guides the purpose and direction of the WA Police Service and places great emphasis on devolution of responsibility to the districts as being the key mechanisms for service delivery to the community.

So we are now expected to believe in what I would have thought was fairly ridiculous rhetoric. I have publicly called this decision idiotic because that is what I believe it is. The commissioner would have us believe that the country areas will have more power by moving the commander to Perth. According to the commissioner, that will equate to more power. What will actually happen in my region is that a district superintendent will have responsibility for 12 police stations and a much larger area. He will have increased responsibilities that will detract from his ability to become a part of the community. Although he lives in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, the fact that he will be moved away altogether will be a great loss to our whole region. The existing commander, Commander Balcschin, is fairly popular among the goldfields community because he has been seen to get out and about, he is not frightened to get his hands dirty, and if he sees an offence being committed, he will take some action and arrest the offenders.

There is a great deal of dismay about this decision. There is no doubt that this decision has been made as a cost-cutting measure in the context of a Police Service that is absolutely crying out for extra resources. As the Leader of the Opposition said earlier today, in real terms there has been a decrease in the Police budget if we take into account increased population and inflationary costs. In his media release dated 4 August 2000, the Commissioner of Police said -

Ultimately the changes should result in associated cost savings.

So the commissioner is at least up-front enough to say that cost savings will result from this action. We all know in country areas that these changes are driven by cost savings, but we do not have confidence that they will improve the Police Service that is available to people of regional areas. There was a big rumour that Geraldton would score the commander’s office and his five staff - that has not happened - and no doubt the member for Geraldton still has problems attracting police to his area, as have I. We have a police station that is severely hampered -

Mr Bloffwitch: We just want our commander in Geraldton, instead of Mandurah where he is at the moment.

Ms ANWYL: Good luck to the member for Geraldton, because I do not think he will get very far with that.

Mr Bloffwitch: I think I will.

Ms ANWYL: We will see. Anyway, my commander will be based in Perth and will have responsibility for 2.3 million square kilometres. He may as well live out at the airport in Perth. I do not know whether a house is being built for him at the airport. The commander will have to cover an area of 2.3 million square kilometres with 52 police stations. How it can be suggested that that is an improvement is beyond me, but no doubt the Minister will make a statement at some stage.

The police in my area have severe resourcing problems. I called a meeting in the suburb of Adeline last week. More than 100 people concerned about crime issues attended that meeting. The police officers who attended were very open and said, “We can’t get there.” The officer in charge of the police station in Kalgoorlie-Boulder actually suggested to the media that it might be a good idea if he had some council-employed private police. He made it very clear to the meeting and on radio that there were gross difficulties in servicing the needs of the community.

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I will explain some of the places I am being told by my constituents that police cannot get to, which include places where offenders are actually inside their homes. They are trying to get call-outs to fires. There was an incident last week in which approximately 40 young people pelted an attending fire engine and the fire officers with missiles. The police are having difficulty getting to those sorts of calls. There have been examples of offenders standing in the street with clear evidence that they were involved in some sort of offence; for example, holding a bag containing takings from a taxi. Several hours later a young officer attended. In one case the officer said, "We have had about eight calls in relation to that alleged offender today." These are the sorts of things that are going on. What is the Government's response? It is to move the commander from our area and say to the new commander, "We will give you the two biggest policing districts in the whole world" will merge them and give you a new one and we will site you in Perth and you will have 2.39 million square kilometres to deal with." This is at a time when single officer police stations and Aboriginal communities are calling out for a permanent police presence, and the Government is a million miles from coming to grips with all of that.

We definitely need a proper inquiry into police resourcing. If we cannot resolve the issue of corruption, we can forget about any legislative response to drug trafficking and the like that plays havoc with people's lives in Western Australia.

MR OSBORNE (Bunbury) [3.48 pm]: I shall speak against the amendment proposed by the Opposition. As I read the words, it seems to me that in at least three key respects the amendment is flawed. The Opposition's call for the establishment of a royal commission will not necessarily have the outcome that the Opposition seems to believe it will. I believe the Opposition secretly does not believe what it says when it says a royal commission should be established in Western Australia.

Ms Anwyl: Do you think it should?

Mr OSBORNE: I will speak about my beliefs on that. The second matter that came to my attention is that the implication in the amendment that we do not have an effective Police Service in Western Australia. I intend to argue against that. The third statement in the amendment from the Opposition refers to a growing crime rate in this State. That is not true and the evidence does not support it.

On behalf of my electorate of Bunbury, I can speak specifically about the so-called rising crime rate. However, before I do I will refer to an article in *The West Australian* on Friday, 4 August written by Anne Burns. In the beginning of the article she refers to what we may see in the next month; that is, an unprecedented level of cooperation between the Opposition and the Government.

Mr McGowan: Is that the one that says you are going to be the next leader?

Mr OSBORNE: I rang the journalist about that.

Mr McGowan: Before she wrote it?

Mr OSBORNE: It was Roger Martin. I said that I could not work out to whom he talked, because my mum died in May. I was trying to work out who thought I had a chance. We had a laugh about it and we agreed that it was a bit of filler for Monday. No, the article to which I am referring was written by Anne Burns and was in last Friday's *The West Australian*. As I said, she referred to the climate we are now coming into ahead of an election, in which both major parties in this State will be engaged in competition to outdo each other in the field of law and order. She concludes those opening remarks - they are reflective of the remarks made by the member for Perth - by saying that we must distinguish between the actual incidence of crime and the fear of crime. The article states -

The climate of fear in Perth, dished up in a daily diet of sordid and graphic crime detail, has created a political environment ripe for the plucking despite the fact that the crime rate is going down.

The Minister for Police has made the point many times in answers to questions without notice that the statistics show that the crime rate in Western Australia is going down. That is also the case in Bunbury. There is a public fear that the south west region is in the grip of a crime boom, but the figures I have from the Police Service indicate that that is not supported by the facts. The problem is that the issue of crime is an emotive one, but the statistics show there has been an overall downward trend in crime in Western Australia. Those figures are also reflected in Bunbury. The figures show that in the past 12 months in the Bunbury district, there has been a general decrease in the number of crimes of damage, while the number of reported sexual assaults, burglary other than domestic burglary, motor vehicle theft and graffiti has not changed. Over that 12-month period, there was a slight general rise in home burglaries, drug offences and, in January, when the population of the south west region practically doubles because of the holiday season, there was a significant increase in the number of stealing offences.