

PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS

115. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Minister for Corrective Services:

Given the neglected state that the former government left our prison system in, can the minister please inform members of progress being made to improve rehabilitation through prison education programs?

Mr C.C. PORTER replied:

I thank the member for his question. Of course, the member will soon be host to the young adult males prison facility in his electorate, which will make a big difference in education and training. In fact, it is a very timely question, because I noted during the second reading debate on the Treasurer's advance bill that there is certainly something of a clear policy divide occurring in this Parliament on the issue of prisons and the issue of criminal justice policy. I will summarise it—I am trying to be absolutely fair to the members for Warnbro, Pilbara and Mindarie in the way that it has been structured. However, there are two limbs that have come out from the opposition regarding prison policy and criminal justice policy. One is a proposition that prisons do not work and that they are a complete or substantial waste of money. The second is an assertion that there are some clear, present alternatives to prison, which will do things like reduce the total amount of imprisonment, reduce rates of crime and, in particular, reduce the percentage of Indigenous prisoners in our prisons. I take issue with some of those assertions. Of course, employment and education work very well inside prisons.

I will raise some of the criticisms that were put about prisons. In fact, the member for Pilbara put them very sharply. He quoted a fellow by the name of Brett Collins, who is a coordinator of a group called Justice Action. This is what Brett Collins said and what the member for Pilbara quoted very approvingly —

“After a period of exclusion they —

That is, prisoners —

feel, instead of having done wrong, they are being wronged, that they have not had their human rights acknowledged.”

Mr Collins described prisons as a “failed experiment”. He said —

“We've done a very careful analysis of the effects of imprisonment and the conclusion we've come to is that prisons cause crime.”

That raises an interesting logical question: if prisons cause crime, what originally caused prisons? In any event, he was also quoted, with approval by the member for Pilbara, as having said —

“When you no longer have imprisonment as an option then you free money ...

Mr Collins says that the money should be spent on mentors instead of prisons. I question the value of spending that money on mentors. The member for Pilbara was being very critical when he said —

Here we are faced with a criminologist, a statistician, who is looking at what people do with funds like these being sought.

Do members know what I did? I had a look into Mr Brett Collins, the criminologist and statistician. It is ironic because, in a way, he has experience in criminology. Mr Collins gained an arts degree in 1982 and a diploma in criminology in 1984. He got those qualifications whilst he was in prison. I make no complaint about that because, of course, one of the things we are trying to do is bring education into prisons. Interestingly, in 2008–09, 48.7 per cent of WA's prisoners were enrolled in education. That is above the national average of 39 per cent. Only South Australia beats us. It equates to 5 378 prisoners enrolled in 32 000 units of study. It is excellent work that has been done —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I formally call the members for Armadale and Joondalup for the first time.

Mr C.C. PORTER: Of course, I am reminded by the Minister for Education that we have won a national award for our education and training. There are two points I would like to close on. Firstly, it is ironic that Mr Collins, who is cited with glowing approval by the member for Pilbara, criticises the ability of prisons to provide rehabilitation and education programs, when he got his qualifications while he was in prison! Secondly, the member for Pilbara held out Mr Collins as some sort of independent academic criminologist who supports Labor's view about how prisons do not work and where we should be investing money.

I have with me Mr Collins' background. If members go to the Community Justice Coalition website, which I recommend all members do, they will see that in 1971 Mr Collins was sentenced —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members! Member for Albany, I will give you a chance to ask questions in this place but continual interjecting will get you called. I formally call you for the first time.

Mr C.C. PORTER: This is the criminologist, cited with approval, to advance Labor's arguments. The website states —

In 1971 he was sentenced to seventeen years in prison. Of the ten years he served he spent long periods in segregation units classified as an intractable prisoner and troublemaker. He is the current NSW record-holder for remaining on a prison roof—3 days. The Australian Government attempted to deport him to New Zealand after the end of his sentence but he gained sufficient community support to allow him back into the country.

Indeed, it is not so much that he was a prisoner but his ideas are now influencing Labor Party policy. I will quote from a recent article published in *The Age* with respect to Mr Collins' support for the notorious paedophile Mr Dennis Ferguson. Mr Collins is the coordinator of the group Justice Action. I will quote directly from the article —

Justice Action's website features a rant in defence of sexual abusers that says: "The punishment for an assault driven by anger causing permanent injury can be light, but an assault driven by lust for pleasure causing no injury can cause lifelong labelling and exclusion."

In other words, psychological damage—damage doubtlessly suffered by victims of Collins's armed robbery of a Stanmore bank in 1971—counts for nought.

Justice Action claims sexual gratification is available only to the "the loved, the beautiful and the rich"—in other words, ugly, unloved, poor people such as Ferguson have no choice but to resort to sexual abuse.

Because most sexual abuse occurs within the family, Justice Action wants such offences to be handled "privately, using the Family Court".

Here is the criminologist that is quoted as supporting Labor Party policy in the debate on prisons—brilliant!