

COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, MINISTERIAL DIRECTION

737. Dr CONSTABLE to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services:

I refer to the recent public dispute between the minister and the Commissioner of Police, and the commissioner's contention that he is not subservient to her views or direction.

- (1) Does she accept that she is responsible to Parliament for all police matters?
- (2) If so, how can the commissioner assert that he is not subject to her lawful direction?
- (3) What action does she intend to take to ensure that the Westminster convention of ministerial responsibility is upheld?
- (4) Does she accept that under the Westminster conventions, the positions of the minister and the commissioner are mutually exclusive and that either she or the commissioner must now resign?

Mrs ROBERTS replied:

I thank the member for Churchlands for her question. Because she has given me no notice of the question, I was unable to jot down all four parts.

- (1)-(4) I do not think any comment has been made by the Commissioner of Police that he is not subservient to me. The matter of subservience has not arisen. Quite clearly, as the member has suggested, we have clear but separate roles. I am the person in this Parliament responsible to report to the Parliament on police matters; I accept that.

I take the opportunity to clarify a few matters about this incident because a lot of misinformation has been put out about it, particularly by some members of this House. First, there was no directive issued to the Commissioner of Police, either a year ago or this week. A year ago I drew the attention of the Commissioner of Police to the Government's policy. I said that is our policy because we have a concern that Asian gangs, such as the M'Bros, the Spider Boys, the Dragon Boys and so forth, are getting out of control, are a concern to the community and we believe we have an obligation to do something about them.

However, because I accept that the Commissioner of Police has operational responsibility for the Police Service and because I accept that he is an expert in this area, I am more than willing to seek his advice. I sought his advice on this issue and said that the reason for our policy was that we wanted to see the issue addressed. I said that if he had a better way of addressing the issue or a better and more modern way of getting to the gang problem and groups of young people using machetes and knives and causing concern on the streets of Perth, he should tell me what it was.

Several members interjected.

Mrs ROBERTS: The Commissioner of Police gave me a briefing note which stated that there was an Asian unit within the Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, that the unit had three full-time equivalent officers and that they were able to draw on the full resources of the Bureau of Criminal Intelligence. I told him that my information was that while members opposite were in government in the previous year, only one person in that unit was available most of the time and, effectively, that one person was often called upon by the BCI to do other work rather than the other way around. The commissioner undertook to seek more information on that matter because I wanted an assurance that at the very least that unit was up to full strength.

I said to him at that time, and I have repeated it many times since then, that I do not care whether it is called a squad, a unit or a task force. I care about the issue being addressed on behalf of the community. That is the assurance that I have sought from the Commissioner of Police.

Mr Birney interjected.

Mrs ROBERTS: If the member for Kalgoorlie and the Leader of the Opposition want me to, I will make an admission: I am keen. I am keen to do the best possible job as Minister for Police by the community of Western Australia. If that means raising issues with the Commissioner of Police that concern the community, I will do it again and again and again.

Several members interjected.

Mrs ROBERTS: I will tell you, Mr Speaker, what happened in the past year. The Commissioner of Police was able to assure me that he had three officers in the Asian unit doing that job full time. Further than that, other officers from the BCI were also properly assisting them and other officers in other areas of the Police Service were collecting intelligence on Asian gangs and doing their job. However, in the past year, there were incidents that alarmed the community immensely, such as a knife fight in Forrest Chase in broad daylight in front of shoppers in the city; a knife attack outside the Church nightclub in Lake Street; another machete attack in

Stirling Street, Northbridge; and last weekend a machete attack in front of several hundred people in Hyde Park. I believe that I have the right as Minister for Police to say to the commissioner, "What is going on here? The community is concerned."

Several members interjected.

Mrs ROBERTS: I said that I wanted an assurance that appropriate resources were going into this issue.

Mr Birney interjected.

Mrs ROBERTS: The member for Kalgoorlie should not misrepresent me, because we can talk about his efforts if he likes. If members opposite want to talk about embarrassing efforts, perhaps we could talk about the member for Kalgoorlie's efforts in the past month. Do members know what he did? Firstly, there was concern about two recruits at the academy -

Mr Birney interjected.

Mrs ROBERTS: The member for Kalgoorlie does not want to hear this.

Point of Order

Mr JOHNSON: The part of the answer that the minister is giving, apart from the fact that she has been going on for a long time, has no relevance to the question.

The SPEAKER: I am sure that the length of the minister's answer has been generated primarily by the large number of interjections that have come from the Opposition's side of the House, especially from the member for Kalgoorlie. I call upon the member for Kalgoorlie not to interject any more and I call upon the minister to answer as quickly as possible.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mrs ROBERTS: Perhaps on another day we can comment on the member for Kalgoorlie's dismal efforts on policing, on his comments on the academy and on his encouragement to police officers to break the law.