

Corrections (Contract Management of Prisons) Amendment Bill — In Committee, Speaker Recalled, In Committee, Third Reading - 24 November 2009

Hon Sir ROGER DOUGLAS (ACT): I came down to the Chamber and I was not inclined to say anything on this Corrections (Contract Management of Prisons) Amendment Bill, but in a way I could not help myself when I listened to the Labour members. When we listen to Labour members these days, whether the issue is prisons, education, health, or accident compensation, it does not really matter, because what they are about is means. They are about public delivery, irrespective of whether the outcome is any good. Those members do not start with objectives and goals, and then ask what the best way to deliver them is. Where they start is with the means, and it has to be the public delivery. It would not matter whether private prisons rehabilitated 50 percent of prisoners and public prisons rehabilitated only 10 percent, because the members opposite would still favour public prisons. That is a tragedy; that is a real tragedy.

I suggest to Labour members that they are going nowhere until they focus on objectives and goals, and not on means. They are in favour of a public system in accident compensation that will lose \$4 billion this year. They are not actually interested in delivery. They are interested in a public education system where 30 percent of our young kids come out unable to read or write properly. They are not interested in the kids, but they are interested in public delivery. At the end of the day, that is what this is all about. It is a question of whether we can introduce a measure of competition. Without doubt, competition is vital. It is just as vital within the public sector as it is within the private sector.

It would be fair to say that competition amongst Government enterprises and between Government enterprises and private organisations helps to ensure that the Government is the servant of the people and not the other way round. Whether or not the Labour Opposition likes it, the fact is that competition is a disciplinary force. It provides consumers with a protection against poor quality services. I suggest that some private sector competition in the field that we are talking about—prisons—would do exactly that. The difficulty for the Labour Party, I think, is that those members have locked themselves so much into the means that they have lost sight of the people whom they are trying to help. Until they get back to focusing on people rather than on means, they are going nowhere.

A recent publication on education by their former Prime Minister, which she sent to a lot of parents, mentioned public education in that letter 12 times and never mentioned a child once. That is where Labour has got to, which is a great tragedy.