

Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP
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**SUBJECT: STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS – CRIME IN THE COMMUNITY**

Dear Mrs Bishop,

I attended the public hearing of your committee today. I believe I may be able to clarify some of the issues raised in the verbal evidence given by three witnesses who appeared before your Committee relative to the issue of the “shredding of the Heiner documents”.

MY BACKGROUND

I was an Executive member of the Queensland State Service Union (QSSU) from August 1988 until about May 1994.

The QSSU amalgamated with the Queensland Professional Officers' Association (QPOA) in 1993 to become the State Public Services Federation.

I first met Mr Kevin Lindeberg in early 1990 shortly prior to his appearance at the Cooke Inquiry.

QSSU EXECUTIVE MEETING LATE 1989.

I cannot recall the exact time of this particular meeting, however the minutes of this particular meeting would be on record.

Executive meetings of the QSSU were held weekly on Thursdays commencing at 4.30pm.

I can recall one particular meeting in late 1989 as it was attended by the then Director of Industrial Services, Ms Janine Walker. This was an unusual occurrence as Executive meetings were usually only attended by the union General Secretary, a Stenographer to take the minutes and the Executive Members.

The union General Secretary explained that he had requested Ms Walker attend the meeting in order to acquaint the Executive of a very serious industrial matter which had arisen at the John Oxley Youth Detention Centre (JOYC).

Ms Walker told the union Executive that a number of members had made complaints about the JOYC centre manager, Mr Peter Coyne. Ms Walker advised the executive that she believed the Coyne had unfairly withheld the pay increment of one employee (QSSU member) and that he had been placed on extended probation of employment.

She further explained that she had received a complaint that Coyne had attempted to break into an employee's home. It was further alleged that Coyne and the Assistant Manager Ms Anne Dutney were having a relationship during office hours.

Ms Walker advised that there were other "complaints of a very sensitive nature which she could not disclose to the Executive".

She stated that the Centre Manager Mr Coyne was "out of his tree" and that she had requested that the Director General of the Department of Family Services, Mr Alan Pettigrew, conduct an inquiry into Coyne's style of management. Ms Walker further stated that "I don't want a witch-hunt, I want it limited to Coyne's style of management".

Ms Walker requested that the Executive endorse her request of Mr Pettigrew. The Executive unanimously endorsed Ms Walker's request.

I cannot recall the union Executive receiving any further reports on the subsequent inquiry, which resulted.

I am not aware to this day what Janine Walker meant by the "complaints of a sensitive nature etc" but I would suspect that it may have been the handcuffing incident whereby Coyne ordered the overnight handcuffing, of two unruly children, to a girl outside, near the tennis courts, overnight. Ms Walker should be able to clarify this point.

At no time was the union Executive made aware of any instances of child abuse (whether physical or sexual) at the JOYC.

MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE JOYC

The operation of the JOYC in 1989 had become dysfunctional. There were four unions who had members at the centre. They were the QSSU, QPOA, QTU (Queensland Teachers Union) and the AWU (Australian Workers' Union).

Thee QPOA membership generally consisted of the professional staff i.e. Manager Coyne, Psychologists etc. The QSSU's membership consisted of the youth worker employees. The QTU obviously covered the teachers and the AWU had some youth workers and other staff.

There was an overlap of award coverage in three of the unions i.e. QSSU, QPOA and AWU. There was some floatation of union membership between these three unions as

staff at the centre joined (or renewed membership) of the union, which was perceived as providing the best service to them at a particular time.

The situation as it existed in 1989 was generally an "us and them" attitude between the youth workers and the professional staff. Mr Coyne had his detractors and his supporters.

I have over the years spoken to Kevin Lindeberg, the QSSU Industrial Officer Kelvin Johnson and Peter Coyne about the operation of the JOYC. I am still at a loss to explain why there was such a push to shred the Heiner Inquiry documents.

I can assure you that from my knowledge that it did not come from the QSSU Executive and it obviously did not come from the QPOA, although some QPOA staff did comply with the Goss government wishes (post shredding) and become part of the cover-up.

I know the former Police Commissioner Mr Noel Neuman (not in his capacity as a serving policeman) has spoken to former Department of Family Services Minister, Ms Berys Nelson (National Party Government until December 1989). I believe that Mrs Nelson had received her own complaints about the operation of the JOYC independent of the unions.

As a result the then Director General, Mr Alan Pettigrew (now deceased) ordered an inquiry under the provisions of the then Public Service Management and Employment Act (PSMC). Noel Heiner, a retired Children's Magistrate, was commissioned by Mr Pettigrew to conduct the inquiry. There may have been a technical problem with this appointment as Mr Heiner was not a serving public servant. Mrs Nelson has indicated that the Heiner Inquiry was only intended to be a preliminary inquiry and that a more formal Commission of Inquiry (Royal Commission) would be established if necessary.

I have not spoken to Mr Coyne since about August 1996. Mr Coyne advised me that at first he welcomed Mr Heiner's Inquiry. Heiner interviewed most of the staff. Coyne advised that some of his supporters approached him and advised him that he had better be careful as it was believed that some of the staff (and possibly Heiner) was out to get him.

I also believe that Coyne held information on some staff at the centre including an admission from a Mr Fred Feitch (not sure of spelling) that he had been abusing the inmates (physical abuse). This I believe may have been tabled at the Forde Inquiry in 1988 together with the complete "document 13" which was partially given to the Senate in 1995.

I believe that Mr Feitch may have been at one time an AWU workplace representative or union delegate.

As Mr Grundy had disclosed Mr Heiner was also given details of the pack rape of the 14-year-old girl as one of the former staff at the centre advised Mr Grundy that Heiner asked, "What do you know about the rape".

I have no doubt that the youth worker staff were keen to tell Mr Heiner of the pack rape, which occurred at the Portals as only the professional staff were on this particular outing and it was seen as a stuff-up.

In 1996 I asked Coyne about the allegations that he broke into an employee's home. Coyne advised that he went to a female employee's home address in order to get some leave forms signed (sick leave – extended) so the employee could receive her pay. He advised that he was just trying to do the right thing by his staff. He advised that the employee was not at home. A neighbour apparently reported to the employee that Coyne had been to her home.

I queried Coyne about the allegations of an "affair during working hours" between himself and the Assistant Manager Ms Anne Dutney. Coyne denied affair.

Coyne advised me that he had visited the centre one evening and found the staff in pajamas, pillows and blankets ready to bed down for the night. He advised that he admonished the staff and stated that they were supposed to be on duty.

I believe that if there was any push by the unions at the JOYC to shred the Heiner documents that the most likely source was the AWU.

The QTU had only a few members, the QPOA was seeking access to the documents, the QSSU from my view I have no knowledge, however Ms Janine Walker may be able to clarify this situation. Mrs Walker may be present at the hearings on 28 October as she is the Treasurer of Sisters Inside. Mrs Warner the former Minister from December 1989 was the Minister for Family Services and is President of Sisters Inside.

I would also like to draw your attention to fact that, the Department of Family Services held a Crown Solicitors' opinion, dated 30 June 1989. This opinion was requested by Coyne and followed up by the Department. This opinion is included in the Cooke Inquiry Reports and it clearly shows that Coyne and others had a right to see complaints, which had been made against him (under regulation 65 of the PSMC Act). The rules of natural justice also apply.

Also included in the Cooke Inquiry Report (AWU section) is an extract of a speech given by Mr Goss (as future Premier) to delegates at an AWU union conference that his door (as Premier) will always be open to union delegates of that union.

I trust the above will be helpful in clarifying some of the issues raised at today's hearing.

Yours sincerely



Des O'Neill