

# OPENING OF AUSTRALIAN CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL TWELFTH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

The theme of your conference, 'The Alienated Generation?', is an apt one.

It offers a way of analysing the reasons for alienation, one of which is crime. It also allows a more general view of some of the merging social trends and problems.

As Minister for Welfare Services in Queensland, my interest in this subject is two-fold.

First, I have responsibility for Prisons.

Prison inmates are one example of alienated people — those who have broken our laws and have committed criminal acts.

The first role of a prison is to secure custody and although more positive programs are being introduced for inmates and staff, the causes of that alienation are not the prime consideration of prisons. Crime rates can be taken as an indicator of the depth of the problem.

The second component of my portfolio, the Department of Children's Services, does have more direct concern about the general fabric of our society and young people. It is therefore concerned about the causes of alienation.

Certainly, the department treats the symptoms — child abuse, social disintegration, and juvenile crime and delinquency.

It is more directly concerned about taking positive steps aimed at the prevention of these problems rather than providing remedial bandaids.

As a Minister of the Crown, I do not pretend to know all the answers to the reasons why alienation has grown, and what can be done.

But, as an elected Member of Parliament, I know there is a genuine public concern about the symptoms of alienation among our young people, although of course the term "Alienation" is not used.

We can all hear and see the characteristics of alienation in the young:

- Their sense of powerlessness
- Their inability to cope with pressures
- Their sense of apathy and cynicism with all our basic institutions of Government, Education and the Church — the so-called establishment
- Their retreat into unreality through physical isolation or drug abuse
- Their resort to violence to attain their desires
- Their struggle for both individual identity and peer group conformity
- The general cheapening of sex, in that they do not see the need for a deep emotional commitment
- The sense of futility in life, work and the future. Suicides are now the second highest cause of deaths, after car accidents, of 16-25 year olds.

## Why has this occurred?

Scientists tell us that alienation is partly caused by our highly complex industrialised society, which has made life specialised and structured.

The need for specialist technical knowledge has broken society into a number of sub-groups and this prevents the community working together to achieve mutual goals.

Economic problems and rising unemployment places added pressure on this already changing pattern, especially among the young where unemployment levels are double the national average.

Expectations given by previous growth and prosperity create a great sense of frustration.



by  
**The Honourable  
Geoff Muntz, M.L.A.  
(Minister for Welfare  
Services, Q'ld.)**

The fall is always greater when expectations have been raised unrealistically high.

Many young people unable to find jobs feel unwanted and cheated.

They turn against what they see as an uncaring system of giant corporations run by faceless executives chasing the magic dollar.

Our whole economic structure is changing to use higher technology which needs the new skills and a new sense of dedication. This change reinforces the sense of frustration and loss of previous expectation.

People who do not have the necessary skills develop a sense of powerlessness and a loss of self-esteem — the feeling of being a useless cog in a machine which is too big.

The education system is geared to select the best to serve specific tasks. It is seen by many as an unfeeling sausage factory, which pigeon holes people on just one yardstick — academic achievement.

Then there is the family unit itself.

Changing roles within the family, the questioning of the purpose of marriage itself, and questioning of the traditional means of child care are making families less capable of looking after themselves.

Rising divorce rates, increases in bashings and child abuse, and general neglect all tell the same story — the family is having problems.

Unfortunately — and let us be quite frank about this — the very way Governments respond to these problems, the very way they try to help alienated youth, often makes the problem worse.

There is no longer a common community of interest. Instead we have shoved the problem onto the Government's plate and said "That's a Government responsibility".

How often have we heard the expression — "Why doesn't the Government do something?"

As a Minister I am not trying to make excuses or to duck responsibilities.

Governments by necessity have tended to rely on bureaucracy with all its accompanying rules and regulations, staffing, specialists and so on.

Sure there are good reasons for that, but they do have limitations.

Government Departments are often seen by those seeking help as inflexible, too distant, and part of the system.

Let me stress that I am talking about the way people see things, not the actual motives of the many dedicated people who work in these organisations.

This type of organisation can only do so much. There are never enough resources, social workers or dollars to meet all the needs.

This is the cry you hear in every State.

Is there a way to overcome the problem of alienation?

Given our levels of unemployment, the expectation that they will continue, and other general social trends, the answer in the short term is "NO".

Change is slow to initiate, but there are steps we can make.

First, we in Government can admit that we do not know all the answers OR have all the resources to meet social problems.

Instead, we can start building genuine bridges — real communication with the community in general, and those we seek to help.

Greater moves for assistance through existing community structures rather than Government agencies would be one way to make contact with those we want to help.

Second, our programs must accept the reality of the economic climate and promote self-sufficiency rather than dependency.

If you make people reliant on handouts, then they will act accordingly — they will manipulate the system to receive the greatest benefit.

Third, let us stop trying to change or find an alternative for

the family and try to work out how to support it so families can deal with problems in their own way.

Fourth, we can co-ordinate Government programs and departments to improve ease of access for those who need them.

Fifth, we must define what our schools need to teach to best prepare students for their later life.

Unless we seriously tackle the basic questions about how we do things, and why we do them, we can expect our society to break up into the haves and the have-nots — the power holders and the alienated.

In my portfolio we have, after considerable consultation with the public, prepared a new Family and Youth Services Bill which will be introduced into the next session of parliament.

This new Bill is an attempt to move in the direction outlined before with:

- More open administration
- More liaison with volunteer and community groups
- More streamlining of procedures.

I know this is but one small step — but the first steps are always the hardest.

The important point is that this Government is aware of the problem of alienation, and as Minister for Welfare Services, I am determined to meet the problem head-on.

Your conference deserves close attention because it is really confronting the basic question of what are the causes of social disharmony.

I wish you meaningful discussion and debate, and officially open your Twelfth Annual Conference.

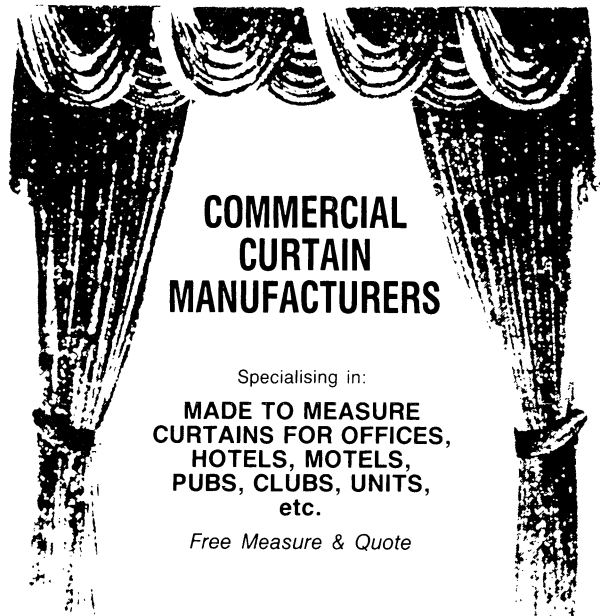
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