

Submission  
No 368

**INQUIRY INTO THE PRIVATISATION OF PRISONS AND  
PRISON-RELATED SERVICES**

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

The Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No.3  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

23 February 2009

Re: Privatisation of prisons and prison-related services

Dear Director,

I write with respect to your committee inquiry into the Privatisation of Parklea and Cessnock Correctional Centre's, and the Court Escort Security Unit. Please take the time to read my submission.

I have been employed with the NSW Department of Corrective Services since 2000. I am currently employed within the Sydney Metropolitan area at Silverwater Correctional Centre. The centre where I work recently housed 500 minimum security inmates in four separate accommodation units. On Monday 2nd March 2009 it will house 150 inmates in one accommodation unit. These inmates will come under the control of Community Offender Services (COS) in the near future, who will then require no custodial staff supervision.

To our surprise two of our accommodation units have now come under the operation and administration of another Correctional Centre and inmates will be moved back into these units. This centre will require more staff. A very small percentage of our staff have been offered positions at this centre. We had approximately 100 custodial officers, which will be shortly reduced to 42.

Coincidentally, the closure of Silverwater Correctional Centre commenced shortly after the death of one of our colleagues at the hands of an inmate. Our local union delegates could not come to an agreement with the Department over our member's requests for personal duress alarms or static cameras for the safety of all who work and reside within the centre. I believe we were seen as agitators and subsequently our centre was closed for this reason. The closure appeared to be a 'union busting' exercise. We requested that systems be implemented to protect us as we did not want it to happen again. It was a shock to everyone and most staff are still traumatised by this event today. I will never forget it, yet I still get out of bed and go to work because simply put, that is my job.

We have not been informed of when our centre will completely close. So far approximately 40 custodial staff have been displaced since November 2008 and moved to other areas and have been offered limited choices of where to relocate.

I have witnessed an extraordinary amount of stress and anxiety from both officers who have left and those who remain. Some officers relocated to Parklea Correctional Centre and some to various locations within the Court Escort Security Unit. We are extremely fortunate that no officer relocated to Cessnock Correctional Centre as I could only imagine the impact of having to relocate twice in a very short period of time would have on their lives, the lives of their family, extended families and network of friends.

Cessnock Correctional Centre is approximately 150 kilometers from Silverwater Correctional Centre.

I can clearly understand the need for reform within the NSW Department of Corrective Services, especially in the current global economic crisis which we are currently facing today. However, I strongly believe that the crisis that we face today will not be solved easily and definitely not by privatising these areas of the Department.

The current Federal Labor Government recently announced a stimulus package, the second of its kind in attempt to stimulate and promote spending by members of the community and businesses. This has been promoted to keep Australia relatively immune from what other countries appear to be facing at present and naturally keep unemployment levels at the current low level.

Will the decision to sell of publicly owned assets and the creation of unemployment within our communities contradict and/or harm the Rudd government's current policy?

We have been informed by our Department that no staff member need lose his/her job as a result of this decision by the government. Obviously privately operated prisons run at reduced staffing levels, how else would they profit. This effectively means that they will not re-employ all of the existing staff at these locations. When this is the case, how will our department guarantee the employment of family members of effected staff when they are forced to relocate to other locations? Will the government guarantee these jobs? How will the government safeguard employment that will be lost indirectly within the communities that surround these centres? This alone does not make economic sense and appears to contradict Mr. Rudd's current policies.

Your committee has outlined terms of reference on which to base submissions. I have researched extensively and have found no data that can positively claim that private prisons operate more cost efficiently than public prisons. If it were true I believe it would be made readily available, especially by the private corporations.

As the committee would be well aware, NSW has one privately operated facility at Junee. I cannot determine from my research if this centre is more cost effective. I don't pretend to be an economist but I can read. There appears to have been numerous studies completed on public versus private correctional centres, not only in Australia but worldwide. The common theme is that it is extremely difficult to compare. As a tax payer I call on the NSW government to provide all tax payers with clear cost comparisons prior to the decision to proceed with privatisation of public correctional centre's and sending tax payer dollars to an overseas owned company. Junee Correctional Centre houses minimum/medium security inmates. I am well aware that many inmates who are violent, rebellious or deemed too much of a risk to manage are sent back to public correctional centres. It appears that the NSW government is attempting to compare apples with oranges.

Why is the High Risk Escort Unit remaining in public control when the government has the transport department ear-marked for privatisation? Are privately operated transport staff as well trained as our staff to escort inmates? Why does Junee Correctional Centre hold only medium/minimum security inmates when it was built as a maximum security centre? The answer is simple, they cannot do it better than what we do! How will magistrates' in far reach communities react when an inmate does not arrive for court on

time? How will a Supreme Court judge react when a terror suspect does not arrive for an appearance on time?

Does the NSW government hope that these terms of reference may not be conclusively addressed through lack of study and public scrutiny and then have no reason not to proceed with this abhorrent plan of privatisation?

The NSW Department of Corrective Services, under the current leadership of Mr. Ron Woodham proudly boasts that we are world leaders in the areas of:

- High levels of public safety and low rates of escape
- Reduced incidence of assaults on inmates and staff
- Disciplinary breaches
- Overcrowding
- Classification systems
- Rehabilitation programmes, mental health support and reduced recidivism rates
- Excellent employee conditions

Why would the NSW government proceed with privatisation if this is correct? Why jeopardise a reputation such as this? Will worldwide dignitaries and prison officials continue to visit our correctional centres and adopt our approaches towards all aspects of corrections if the government diminishes our reputation? If the NSW Department of Corrective Services are world leaders in our field then how do privately operated correctional centres compare? If the figures are incorrect then maybe the government should be investigating into how NSW Department of Corrective Services could improve these services prior to the privatisation strategy.

According to the NSW Ombudsman Annual Report 2005-06, "Unfortunately there are continuing high numbers of complaints from inmates at Junee Correctional Centre, which is operated by GEO Pty Ltd. We receive significantly more complaints from Junee than any other centre. We are also receiving a number of complaints about serious matters such as inmates' release dates, their security, and their access to legal representation." Publically operated correctional centres also produce complaints to the NSW Ombudsman, that seems to be the nature of some of those in custody, but the question must be asked, Why does Junee Correctional Centre produce the most complaints to the Ombudsman?

I urge the Australian Labor Party to attempt to become pioneers of a world leadership approach to how we manage corrections. Let us not continue down the same path of the US, UK, European and African nations, by privatising and profiting from incarceration. This approach is a cop out from this extensive social problem that exists within all societies. Please don't make the same mistakes now as other nations and become 'red-faced' when you may have to retrieve these correctional centres from the private companies. With a positive and sensible approach between all stakeholders it is possible.

The real issue in the desperate need to privatise areas seems to be the cost of overtime that exists within our Department. This may be true but due to the severe lack of staffing and huge increases in inmate numbers compared to officer numbers in recent years, this of course will be inevitable. Has the NSW government or our department studied the cost effectiveness of employing more staff within correctional centres therefore eliminate this overtime cost. This would surely increase employment levels as per the Federal

government's current policies. Are the NSW government and/or our department incapable of solving the problem of cost issues? Is the only answer to blame the officers that are employed within our department by 'roting' the overtime?

I have been an Australian Labor Party supporter from an early age. I have always voted for the ALP. I hope my children will be able to cast their vote towards the ALP. My father was employed for approximately 45 years as a guard on the railway. I learnt from my father that the basic creed of the ALP is to protect and stand up for the rights of the workers. He was proud when I made the choice to become a public servant. I have until this point felt secure very in my job. I go to work aware of the dangers I face. I have a commitment to protect the community, my colleagues and staff at all cost. Don't take that away from me. Let me pass on to my children the same ideas and beliefs that my father passed on to me.

Sincerely