

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO

**At Waterloo Neighbourhood Centre on
Friday, 15 October 2004**

The Committee met at 4.00 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods (Chair)

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans
The Hon. Kayee Griffin

MIHAIL FAINSHTEIN, BELLA FAINSHTEIN, SOLOMON GUTMAN, COLINA KHAIT, LEV KHAIT, LIPKINA LIDIYA, NINA SHAPIRO, MICHAEL SHAPIRO, FRIDA SHINDERMAN, FANYA TESLER and ILYA VAITSMAN, residents of Waterloo estate, assisted by interpreter of the Russian language, **ELENA FRAMPTON**, before the Committee:

CHAIR: We want to talk about Waterloo, where you all live, and we want you to tell us what the Government needs to do to make Waterloo a better place to live.

Mr VAITSMAN: On the question of safety in this area, it depends on the laws, which never are enforced. The sergeant, policeman, I have talked to him and he said that he can't do anything because, within the limits of the law, that is as much as he can do.

The first request is to change the law about self-defence because if some criminal or whatever does something like robs me, or even children or teenagers throwing things, stones, whatever, we can't do anything or, if we do, that is against the law, so if the law changes, we can act too so that the criminals or whoever will be thinking twice to actually do something to us. Why do they sell in America such things like gas in some spray cans?

CHAIR: Capsicum spray.

Mr VAITSMAN: Whatever sprays in America, it is allowed there, so why is it not allowed here? Why is it in England that a 12 year old child, if they commit an offence, they send them to prison. What about Australia? We are preparing a letter to prime minister of the State, Bob Carr, because all these talks and nothing has been changed. We wrote a letter to the city council and nothing has changed since then. Why is it in a good area like Bronte or whatever you can't see any teenagers or whoever walking late, and here everyone is walking up to midnight or 1 a.m., there are children or teenagers always out in the street, and it is as though they don't have parents and parents don't look after them. There is no such picture in the better areas like Bronte. If the children are like that, no one looks after them, parents can't look after them or don't want to look after them or are incapable, in this case they should remove children out of their families.

INTERPRETER: He doesn't say what to do with them.

Mr VAITSMAN: If the parents can't, the society or somebody else should look after the children. If there are children or teenagers in parents' care, if the policeman takes them, detains or whatever, they must ask the parents to come and fine parents for whatever their child has committed twice, three times, and then parents will be thinking to look after their children more if they don't want to be fined for what their children have done.

CHAIR: Would someone else like to make a comment about the issues, the law and police and bad behaviour?

Ms SHINDERMAN: First of all, we all support the police. Whatever he said was right.

Mr FAINSHTEIN: I have been living here for 24 years now. They used to have benches here. We requested the bench to be put there again. They did it for some other houses, but it meant when we go there they do not allow us to sit there because we are not from here and no-one put benches back into our area. So we requested the benches again and there was some inspection people came and did an inspection and they promised us they would put the benches there, but we never heard from them any more and we do not know how long we will be living because many are disabled people and are already dying.

CHAIR: So is this a problem with the Department of Housing and the facilities it provides and the work it does in the estate. Is that a big problem for anybody else?

Ms LIDIYA: We have problems with lifts. They do not work very often. They break and

also the lighting inside the houses, in the corridors.

Mr VAITSMAN: I have a question again about the lifts. Is there any document at all which describes what is the capacity of the lifts and all the mechanical, whatever, because why is it breaking so often?

CHAIR: Can someone give us an example of how long it might be that a lift is out of order, one day, a week?

Mr FAINSHTEN: It could be a whole week.

Mr SHAPIRO: The entrance doors to the buildings do not work properly and they also break very often.

Mr FAINSHTEN: It used to be that there was one manager, an on-site manager looking after one or two buildings, and it was all right, they looked after the buildings, but now there is no-one there and we do not know who these people were. So things are left unattended for a long time, rubbish and the doors and the lifts and everything. Now what is happening is, if we have a problem, we go back to the Department of Housing here and we tell them about the problem and they tell us to call the call centre, and in the call centre they do not do anything now and when we call there no-one actually comes and does anything.

CHAIR: To clarify, this is the office here, which has I think officially nine workers, but you are saying that they do not handle the complaints, they ask the tenant to--

Mr FAINSHTEN: Many years ago they usually came to our home, did an inspection or whatever, and they asked, "What is wrong, what do you want to be done", and we told them and it was done, but what is happening now, if something is wrong, we go there - for instance if my taps did not work, I went there, they came and changed the handles, but I wanted them to change the taps. They did not change them.

CHAIR: Would everyone agree that maintenance is a big problem?

INTERPRETER: Maintenance, many people say yes.

CHAIR: What about the sort of community service position, assistance from Centrelink about pensions for instance, assistance with health issues, do you have comments to make about those services that are available, either on the estate or in Waterloo?

Mr KHAIT: My wife and daughter were robbed here in this area. After that the police strengthened their forces and it became better. What happened when things became better, maybe the police sort of thought everything is calm and they are not going to intervene and they are not coming as often as they used to or should come, and it happened again only one hour ago when we had a meeting there with the Russian TV and the woman came there and very quickly someone opened her bag and took her purse, and I think that incident shows that there should be more surveillance, police, or something should be done because it is really, excuse my gestures, but girls who are teenagers, like 13 or 14 years old, they come up to my wife or something and show their fingers. Why? I have never seen that anywhere. It is probably the worst area possible for such behaviour, such incidents, than anywhere else. When the police were called and we talked about the incident, of course her mother started pretending that nothing happened, that she can't do anything, and suddenly the police said that I had beaten her up or whatever, because my wife went to her mother to complain and tell her about the daughter's behaviour, but that is the problem.

Ms LIDIYA: If the police find her parents, if they find her mother, they maybe would have thought twice about their behaviour.

CHAIR: Could I ask about some other issues? One thing that has been mentioned to us as a

big problem for people living in Waterloo is transport, buses, difficulty of going shopping or going to hospital. Could people give us their views about whether transport is a problem for them?

Mr KHAIT: No.

INTERPRETER: Do you mean for the rules of the traffic? There is quite enough traffic for them to go shopping or whatever.

Mr VAITSMAN: I have one more request about drug addicts and the mentally sick people, because there is a request to house them separately in one place, otherwise they burn the house, they jump out of the window and injection and everything, and normal people cannot live with them. So it is better to house them separately.

CHAIR: Do you all agree that transport is not a major problem?

INTERPRETER: They all said no problem, but I will ask them again.

Mr VAITSMAN: Don't think that we got together only for complaining, we must tell you that we are quite happy with the traffic routes, with the public transport routes.

CHAIR: It has been suggested that we ask why there is such a big Russian-speaking community here in Waterloo and whether they are happy with the services provided for them as a non-English speaking community?

Mr KHAIT: That is how they housed us. They housed some and then someone else know and they put them all in the queue and they are all housed in this area, but if you housed us somewhere in Bondi we will go.

Mr VAITSMAN: That would be better.

CHAIR: What about the adequacy of services for people who do not have English as their first language, health services or whatever, where people can be understood?

Mr KHAIT: I personally don't know. Maybe some older people have some services, but I don't know about any. If we go somewhere, everywhere interpreters go, so we don't suffer.

Ms TESLER: There are some services. They come to older people or people who can't do much. They do shopping, they give them a lift to doctors or whatever, so they are quite happy and thank Australia for that, so older people are looked after well, but we are raising the question about safety. All other services we are quite happy with.

CHAIR: I think we have received that message.

Ms TESLER: I want to find out what is the role of the security on site? What do they actually do and how do they contribute to our safety, if at all? What can one security person do, and also one security person for four buildings? He sort of walks around and observes but, while he is in one building, two buildings away there is a robbery or something and he can't really do anything. When we enquired, they don't even carry guns with them, so what is their role?

CHAIR: Do you think that more police need to be stationed in Waterloo?

INTERPRETER: They are all saying yes.

Ms TESLER: So many years ago there was a person or manager that was on site and this manager knew everyone in the building and knew who was coming to whom and safety was maintained to a certain level, but then when he disappeared that is what happened.

CHAIR: Do you think that, with the new system of security guards, those people don't know people, they come and go?

Ms TESLER: Yes, it is really not much use, it is only one person for four and they don't know anyone. You are just wasting money.

CHAIR: Some people have argued that the police who are all based at Redfern pay too much attention to Redfern and not enough attention to Waterloo. Does anyone here have an opinion on that?

Mr KHAIT: Maybe because of the things which have happened in Redfern lately, that is why they are paying more attention to Redfern, not to Waterloo.

CHAIR: What sort of things do you mean? Do you mean the drug problems?

Mr KHAIT: That is why maybe they pay attention more, because of the riot.

Mr VAITSMAN: They all do it. I requested the Department of Housing through the manager who was here to somehow collaborate with police in a sense, when police are patrolling in their car, if they go to certain places, but in between calls for them not to sit in the car, just to sit in our building, and in fact they agreed to that, but somewhere people change and nothing happened, but it was put in writing.

Mr FAINSHTEIN: It used to be we had security 24 hours and they had more, two people, but now we never see them. Then it was only until midnight and now I can't see anyone at all.

Ms LIDIYA: Who is actually responsible for the electricity waste, because I see in the whole area street lights are on during the day, so there is such a waste of energy and money.

CHAIR: We can ask someone that question.

Mr VAITSMAN: Eleven street lights near our house and they are all on 24 hours.

CHAIR: I think we have definitely taken the message that the major issue is safety and security. Before we finish, is there any different or new issue that people want to raise with us?

INTERPRETER: Mihail Fainshtein is asking about the benches.

CHAIR: We know about the benches. Anything else?

Mr KHAIT: We have finished about everything, but I ask you again to pay attention to the speech of Ilya and whatever is written on his paper, all the issues, because we all support what he said.

INTERPRETER: Ilya said that he will send you a copy because after today's meeting he wants to change a little bit.

CHAIR: Are people happy for us to have the transcript of what has been said recorded amongst our records and made public, so that it is on paper but also on the Parliament House web site?

INTERPRETER: They said that is why we got together, for people to know the issues.

CHAIR: We will make sure that somebody here - Ilya or someone else - gets a copy so that they can have a look at it. There might be an issue about someone translating it.

Thank you all very much and I think we hear very clearly what you are concerned about.

(Briefing concluded at 5 p.m.)

(The Committee adjourned at 5 p.m.)