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Title:

Press release from Social Welfare Minister: Juvenile Abscondings

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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE SOCIAL WELFARE MINISTER, MR. KING.

21.4.72

JUVENILE ABSCONDINGS.

The problem of abscondings from institutions for juvenile offenders was a difficult one, the Social Welfare Minister, Mr. King, said today.

He was commenting on recent Press reports about abscondings.

"Paradoxically, however, there is one simple solution.

"We could make absconding virtually impossible by the erection of barbed wire fences, high walls, armed guards, searchlights and towers and so transforming our institutions into maximum security prisons.

"That would solve the immediate problem and create horrendous social problems for the future from the hardened criminals such a system would undoubtedly produce.

"I am convinced such an approach would not only be counter-productive but would also defeat the purpose of treatment and rehabilitation. I do not believe it would be supported by South Australians.

"We are seeking to tackle this - and all the other related problems of young offenders in our society - by a thorough overhaul of our approach to delinquency.

"This is embodied in legislation approved by State Parliament and now being implemented.

"However, a programme of this magnitude cannot be put into full effect overnight nor can it produce instant solutions.

"It must be remembered that the young people committed to our institutions are not only offenders, they are among the most disturbed youths in our society.

"It must also be remembered that they must one day be released.

"Our aim is to do all we can to ensure that - when that time comes - the maximum possible number will be reformed and rehabilitated.

"This is why we are laying stress on identifying the problems of young offenders, on treating them accordingly, on providing them with the disciplined background and counselling they require and on providing more and better trained staff.

"The Government is now actively recruiting and training the additional staff required to administer this system.

"We are also improving security and supervision within the institutions to reduce opportunities for absconding and to provide youths with constructive alternatives to indiscipline and frustration.

"I believe that the long-term effect of this approach will be a reduction in the number of abscondings, and more importantly a drop in the number of second-time offenders and hardened young criminals.

"It would be tragic if the community's proper concern with the present problem resulted in a backlash effect which led to increasing crime rate and wastage of potentially valuable human lives.

"The present spate of absconding is probably attributable in some degree to the effect on the juvenile mind of current publicity.

Mr. King said he was continually reviewing security arrangements at the institutions to see how they could be improved and that he was obtaining a detailed report from his Department on last night's incident. The allegation that a youth was encouraged to abscond will be made the subject of an investigation by an independent investigator on the staff of the Crown Law Department.