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**ON CORRECTIONS (CONTRACT MANAGEMENT
OF PRISONS) AMENDMENT BILL**

MAY 09

ABOUT THE SUBMITTERS

1. We are all employed by the Department of Corrections as Corrections Officers, and work at the Auckland Central Remand Prison ("ACRP").
2. The Prison was operated by a private contractor GEO Limited, from 2000 until 2005. We all worked at the prison when it was operated by the private contractor, and have experienced similar time working for both the contractor and the Department of Corrections.

EXPERIENCE WORKING FOR GEO

3. While working for GEO, we were always aware that there was company and corporate policy about how the prison should operate. The corporate policy drove many of the day to day decisions about how the prison should be run.
4. In the view of the submitters, decisions were made on a day to day basis that were intended to protect the reputation of GEO, and also to ensure that performance bonuses provided under the contract were obtained by GEO.
5. An example would be issues surrounding concerns raised with staff. GEO did not want to take disciplinary sanctions against staff. Staff who were in trouble would be offered the option to resign from their employment. This would avoid the need for staff to be dismissed, and kept matters quiet.
6. We are aware from media reports, and the explanatory not of the Bill, that it is suggested that ACRP operated in a more efficient and innovative way than prisons under the Department of Corrections. We do not agree with that.
7. We are surprised at the suggestion that ACRP operated more efficiently while under the contractor. When the contractor was here, we had a maximum muster of 299 prisoners, and a staff full time equivalent of 127 positions. We now have a maximum muster of 412, and a staff full time equivalent of 138 positions. That's only an additional 11 staff positions added with an muster increase of 113 prisoners.
8. This in our view, is evidence that the prison functions more efficiently now, than when it was under the private operator.
9. We are not aware of education programmes, or crime prevention programmes that were of a higher quality, or more innovative than programmes that the Department has operated.

10. It is our view that the Department of Corrections have better programmes for anger management, and that the Department have programmes that are integrated into programmes in prisons where remand prisoners are likely to spend time following their sentencing. There is a more integrated approach to programmes with the total Prison Service.
11. We are aware of the prison being operated in a way that ensured compliance with the contract, and we were always aware that the provisions of the contract did determine how things were run at times.
12. The systems that were in place were not robust. For instance, in relation to drug programmes, there was an incentive for the contractor not to find drugs within the prison. The approach with the Department of Corrections is quite different, and there is a genuine wish to find drugs if they are present.
13. Other examples are the approach that was taken to prisoners who threaten self harm. Under the Department of Corrections, we are encouraged to report that such incidents have occurred, and ensure that prisoners are assessed by the appropriate professional. There was a reluctance in the GEO days to report incidents of self harm. We simply monitored the situation and avoided reporting if we could. This was what we were told to do by the Unit Managers.
14. The contract between GEO and the Department of Corrections provided for drug testing.
15. During the period that ACRP was run by the contractor, there were two escapes from the prison. There have been no escapes in the period that the prison has been operated by the Department of Corrections.
16. In fact the escape was a good example of the use of resignations, where the Department of Corrections would have a proper investigation, and would not allow an employee who had breached their obligations to simply

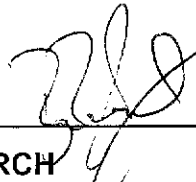
resign. One of the prisoners escaped by being allowed into the visiting area, and leaving the prison with other visitors.

17. The prisoner had been escorted to the visiting area by a Corrections Officer, who it turned out was related to him. She did not follow procedures, and it was believed through the prison that she had assisted the prisoner with his escape.
18. That Prison Officer was allowed to resign her employment. This would not happen under the Department of Corrections. The staff member had breached policy. It is also likely that she had committed a criminal offence. Rather than address these issues, this matter was simply swept under the carpet.
19. At times the drug testers would be placed on the floor of the prison, to cover for so called staff absences. Everybody knew that this took place when there had been a significant number of positive tests. We all believed that this was to ensure that the number positive drug tests did not exceed the requirements of the contract.
20. From 2001 to April 2003, there was an officer in charge of the sampling process. A drug dog handler would generate a number of reasonable cause tests to be sampled, which were then done straight away at the direction of the Intel Manager.
21. At the same time, random drug testing was being completed. Any prisoner that was selected for a random test, that had been tested under reasonable cause, would be given twenty eight days to be sampled pending the result of the reasonable cause test.
22. The sampling process was directed by the Intel Manager. The purpose was to keep the general random percentage low, so that the quarterly bonus from the Department was not lost.

23. The Department of Corrections have instituted an emergency response team, and also an advanced control and restraint team. This team would be deployed in a riot situation. We have a more structured response now to issues of discipline arising in the prison, and we have had better training than was provided when the prison was operated by a private contractor.
24. It is important to remember the type of work that Prison Officers complete. We are continually working in a high risk environment. It is important that Corrections Officers be of a high calibre.
25. We earned significantly less when we were employed by the contractor than we earn employed by the Department of Corrections. In addition, there were frequently casuals working during the period of the contract. This meant that we were working with Prison Officers who were not as well trained, not well experienced, and who did not know the operation of the prison or the prisoners. This exposed us to a greater level of danger.
26. A times, Australian staff were bought over. Many of the Australians had not worked with either the Maori or Pacific Island prisoners or corrections officers and did not relate well. The Australian officer's were paid significantly more than the New Zealand officer's and were taking jobs off New Zealand officers.
27. We do not wish to go back to working in this type of environment, and believe that there are serious issues of safety arising from contractors being employed.
28. The Corrections Department also provides a career structure for Corrections Officers with Senior Correction Officers and Principal Corrections Officers. There was no such structure when the prison was operated by the contractor.

Representatives of the Submitters seek to appear before the Select Committee.
Contact can be made to Bart Birch (0272896098 or 096381724 wk).

Dated this 21 day of May 2009



**BART BIRCH
ON BEHALF OF THE SUBMITTERS**