

TASMANIA TOMORROW REFORMS

[6.09 p.m.]

Mr MARTIN (Elwick) - Madam President, I know I will not be too popular making an adjournment speech on a Thursday night. A lot of members have a fair distance to travel. I will be brief. I will not have another opportunity for weeks so I cannot let this opportunity go by without expressing my absolute frustration - in fact, my disgust - with the manner in which the Government is handling the Tasmania Tomorrow reforms of the education system. I thank the Government for the briefing today; it was very much appreciated, but the fact is that I have been waiting all year to see legislation come before this House. This is a major reform of the education system, probably the most significant reform in decades. There has been a lot of speculation and talk about it and many of my constituents have concerns about it, and I think other members are getting the same feedback.

I have come in here every time expecting this to come up because we know it is the Government's intention to start the new system in the next school year. I just find it extraordinary. I wrote to the Premier's office on 10 September seeking information and perhaps a copy of the draft legislation, but I did not get a reply, so I do appreciate the briefing, which was the most information we have had so far. I certainly congratulate the three chairmen of the three proposed organisations for giving their time and the candour of their presentation today and the other government officials.

What I find extraordinary is that we still have no legislation to examine, so we have no detail. Personally, I have dozens and dozens of queries that need to be addressed before I could support this proposed restructuring. We have been told today that it will be 14 October before the legislation comes into the House of Assembly, and 29 October before it comes into the Legislative Council. By the time it comes to us it will be just three months before the new system starts. I find that extraordinary. But guess where the buck stops for approving this restructuring? It stops in this Chamber. We are the last decision-making body and our support is needed before this restructure can take place. This involves the setting up of the polytechnic, the academy and the training enterprise - the most significant restructuring of the education system we have had in decades - and we, where the buck stops, the final approval body -

Mr Parkinson - No, the buck stops with the Government.

Mr MARTIN - See, that is the problem, because I do not think the buck does stop with the Government, and that probably highlights the problem. That is the arrogance of executive government and that concerns me because the buck actually stops here, because we have to approve it. It cannot happen if this Chamber does not approve it, yet we have a situation where the boards have been appointed; the CEOs have been appointed; the staff apparently have not been officially appointed, but I know that a lot of staff know that they are going to be working in the new organisations next year; the curriculums have been sent out; and I think all of us have received invitations to attend

Wrest Point on 9 October to see the Premier launch the new organisations. Yet we are the final decision-making body and all this action has taken place.

We know that there is a lot of uncertainty and widespread concern amongst staff, teachers and parents and friends organisations, all because, like us, they do not have any detail to go on yet and by the time we get the detail it is going to be three months before the first polytechnic and academy opens. We are still three or four weeks away from seeing the legislation, let alone having the opportunity to debate it.

Again, I thank the Government for the briefings today but I have many unanswered questions that I will need to be satisfied about before I can support the legislation and thus support the restructuring.

The college in my constituency is Claremont College, with which I have a long history and feel a lot of personal ownership of. My involvement with Claremont College goes back to the 1980s when I was chairman of the action group that fought the then Liberal Government to get a college built in the northern suburbs because our kids in the northern suburbs - Glenorchy, Bridgewater, Southern Midlands and New Norfolk - were being disadvantaged. What I want to assure myself of, from a parochial point of view in relation to this issue, is that this new restructuring is not going to disadvantage those kids out in that area.

It is only three months before the change takes place. I just think we have been treated as if we were a rubber stamp and I think the Leader's interjection is an indication of the thinking that executive government is the final arbiter on this.

Mr Parkinson - No, it is not.

Mr MARTIN - No, we are. I just want to express my frustration that the executive government appears to be treating this Parliament as if we were a rubber stamp. I want to make it quite clear that I do not intend to be a rubber stamp on this issue and I will be looking at the legislation very carefully. I think what the Government is doing on this issue is treating this Parliament, especially this Chamber, with utter contempt and it deserves to be condemned for the sheer arrogance of doing so.

Mr Parkinson - We are not. What I meant was that the buck stops with the Government at election time.

The Council adjourned at 6.17 p.m.