



Don Wing MLC

Legislative Council

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Electorate: Launceston

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr WING (Launceston) - Mr President and honourable members, I am proud to have been elected to the Legislative Council to represent the electorate which bears the name of the city in which I am privileged to live. It is a particular pleasure to speak in reply to the address of the Lieutenant-Governor, as His Excellency Sir Guy Green has been a valued and respected friend of mine for many years. I wish to take this early opportunity in this Chamber to congratulate His Excellency upon his appointment as Lieutenant-Governor and upon the conferment of his knighthood. It is gratifying that his very special qualities and talents have been so appropriately recognised, leading as they have to his rise to such high office at an early age, to the great benefit of the people of this State. I wish to pay tribute also to Lady Green for the natural and dignified manner in which she discharges the demanding public role she is required to perform, while setting a fine example as a wife and mother.

I extend my congratulations to honourable members who were also elected on 22 May and to the honourable members who have been elected and appointed to office in this Council. Like the honourable member for Hobart, I have been made to feel very welcome since taking my seat in this Council and I thank you, Mr President, and honourable members for the warmth of the welcome and for the help and friendship I have experienced during the short time I have been here.

I congratulate the Government on the fact and the extent of its election victory. It is certainly acting in a positive and decisive manner and I think it would do well to take heed of the advice of the honourable member for Macquarie. I hope and expect that the actions of the Government will continue to be decisive and that they will be in accordance with the true principles and spirit of democracy. I feel confident that they will be.

In the community, I sense a definite feeling of renewed hope in the future of our State which has such enormous potential and so much to offer in terms of quality of life and in so many other ways. The Government has a most important and most difficult task to perform and it is obviously tackling it with vigour and a clear sense of purpose. Whilst it continues to do that it will no doubt receive strong support throughout the community and certainly from this Chamber. But, as the honourable member for Meander said, when it is due no doubt there will be some criticism.

In his speech His Excellency makes reference to the fact that support is expected from the private sector of the community. I feel confident that support will be forthcoming from that sector but to enable the private sector of the community to give full support to the Government in its efforts, it will be necessary also for the Federal Government

to give considerable support. I hope that before very long there will be support from the Federal Government in the form of tax incentives and the lowering of interest rates. That will help the private sector which will in turn help the State Government.

Mr President, I am very proud to represent the electorate of Launceston. I have felt that at times I have been guilty of parochialism. I was interested in the parochialism displayed in this Chamber in the good-natured rivalry between the honourable Deputy Leader and the honourable member for Pembroke in discussing the merits of expenditure by the Government on Bruny Island as compared with the Eastern Shore. But when I heard the suggestion by the honourable member for Tamar, in terms of parochialism I felt a rank amateur.

I feel that I can view the affairs of this State with some degree of objectivity. I was born at Ulverstone and educated at the primary level there; I received my secondary education in Launceston and my tertiary education in Hobart. Perhaps it is because I have spent the last 20 years living in Launceston that I have come to the realisation that Launceston does not receive a fair share of expenditure of government money in so many areas. That is not always the case in other areas of the State. I have consistently said that Launceston should not receive extra expenditure at the expense of other areas, but it should enjoy a fair and equitable distribution of government expenditure.

Hobart and many centres on the north-west coast have very fine roads. Both areas deserve them; but my view is that Launceston does too. Yet it has missed out in the expenditure of government moneys, on roads in particular, time and time again.

In recent weeks I have heard misguided criticism about the per capita expenditure on Launceston roads compared with the per capita expenditure on Hobart roads. The comment I wish to make, Mr President, is that even if Launceston received disproportionately favourable per capita expenditure on roads for 20 years, that would hardly redress the imbalance that has existed for many years. It was heartening for me - and, I know, for the residents of northern Tasmania generally - to learn that the Government has committed itself to an expenditure of \$20 million for northern roads and to the completion of the Southern Outlet road as a four-lane highway with median strips. That is very important for the continued development of the Launceston area.

I do not seek to debate comparisons with other areas, but Launceston certainly is developing. In my electorate I can point to two important instances where there have been very significant developments in the private sector. Firstly, the Penny Royal and Gunpowder Mill complexes near the centre of the city and, most recently, the Federal Hotels Country Club and Casino complex, both of which have injected vast sums of money into the community and both of which will provide employment for the future.

So Launceston is certainly progressing, albeit with prudence. But it has certainly been retarded by an inequitable expenditure of State government funds and in my opinion it has also been retarded by the failure to achieve some rationalisation of boundaries in the area. I am very pleased to see that the honourable member for Macquarie has introduced a proposal for a committee to be re-established to continue investigating the feasibility of amalgamation.

I hope the Government will follow previous examples - started, I think, by the Bethune Government - of the Cabinet meeting in various parts of the State. That will help it to keep in close contact with the people of the State and make the whole Cabinet more accessible to the people. I feel consideration could also be given to having some government departments based outside the Hobart area. I hope the Government would see it as being feasible to have one, perhaps two, departments based in Launceston and perhaps the same on the north-west coast. In my view the Department of Mines could appropriately be located at Burnie, close to the main mining areas of the State. We must never forget that, unlike any of the other Australian States, the majority of our population of Tasmania is distributed throughout the State and that more than half the population lives outside the capital city.

I now turn to standards in Parliament because, as has been mentioned by other honourable members, there is dissatisfaction in the community with what the public sees as declining standards in most houses of parliament, with an apparent increase in self-interest. I take this opportunity very sincerely to commend the Legislative Council, you, Mr President, and honourable members of this Council for the very fine standards that apply in this House. That is a credit to you and your predecessors and to honourable members of this House and their predecessors. This Council sets a fine example to houses of parliament in other areas for its dignity, decorum and the purposefulness with which members debate issues. I am sorry to say this is in stark contrast to most other houses in other parliaments of this country where all too frequently members tend to forget the real issues they should be debating and descend to personal abuse, personal criticism and in many cases childish behaviour which degrades the practice of politics.

Parliamentarians throughout this country need to take stock of themselves. I do not suggest for one moment that all parliamentarians in Australia outside of this Chamber deserve criticism. There are many people who uphold fine traditions of dignity and decorum, but there are others in most of the houses who unfortunately do not and that tends to taint others with the same brush. So it is necessary for all members who have the privilege of serving in any parliament in this country to stand back, have a look at themselves, their colleagues, their houses and decide what steps can be taken to improve the image of parliamentarians generally.

It is refreshing to learn that the new Speaker in the Assembly has set down new standards which he requires members to observe. That is a step in the right direction and I feel the new Speaker, because of his personal qualities and standards, is a most suitable person to preside over the Assembly, especially during the period of what I hope will be the restoration of its standards. Much needs to be done in this area in all parliaments, constructively and with a sense of purpose, and in order to achieve the maximum results self-interest needs to be cast aside.

As set out in His Excellency's address, the Government proposes to reduce the number of members of this Parliament. Most people have believed for many years that Tasmania is over-governed. That has often been said but, until the policy which was put to the people of Tasmania at the last House of Assembly election, no effort has been made in recent times to actually do anything about it. I commend the Government for its policy. I believe it deserves strong support. I firmly believe that

with a population of a little over 420 000 people we do not need 54 members of Parliament to govern this State, and I have found in the community overwhelming support for the policy to reduce the number of members of Parliament. If we are to be responsive to the wishes of the people - and I believe, like the honourable member for Cornwall and the honourable member for Macquarie, that we need to be - I feel this proposal merits very strong support and should receive it.

With ever-increasing costs of government all unnecessary expenditure must be pruned. I do not think it can be argued, looking at the numbers in this House for example, that there is a need for 19 members. I believe this honourable Chamber could function at least as effectively - and probably more effectively in terms of time - with 15 members as it could with 19. Irrespective of the historical reasons for the numbers being 19 in this House and 35 in the Assembly there must be contemporary justification for a retention of the present numbers and I suggest, with respect, that there is none.

Mr President, not only do I believe there is no such justification but I believe there are very compelling reasons for a reduction. By way of comparison I refer to some statistics relating to the number of members of Parliament in other States and also to the cost of parliamentary government in other States. In New South Wales, the cost of State parliamentary government is \$3.83 per person; in Victoria, it is \$4.30; in Queensland, \$5.74; in South Australia \$6.12; in Western Australia \$7.72; and in Tasmania the very high figure of \$12.95. I appreciate there are certain basic costs common to any parliament, irrespective of its size, which must increase the cost for the smaller parliaments. But even making allowance for that, the cost of providing State parliamentary government in Tasmania is more than three times that of New South Wales and more than twice that of South Australia. I would take an enormous amount of convincing that that is necessary or desirable.

Turning to a comparison of the number of members of State Parliament in Tasmania compared with that of other States, per 100 000 people New South Wales has 2.67 members of State Parliament; Victoria - on my calculations - 3.21; Queensland, 3.63; South Australia, 5.31; Western Australia, 6.85 and Tasmania, 12.74. The average number of members of State Parliament in the mainland States, per 100 000 people, is 3.61, so we have more than three times the average of mainland States and more than four times the number in New South Wales.

Mr President, I suggest this shows that the number of parliamentarians in this State is grossly disproportionate to the other States and indicates quite clearly that we have many more than are needed. Certainly some arguments could be developed against the reduction in the number of members of Parliament here but one needs to look only at those comparative figures to realise that such arguments could not compete with the very compelling conclusions that must be drawn from a comparison of those figures.

It is interesting to look back in history to see how the number of members of this honourable Chamber and of the Assembly have varied over the years. In 1898 there were 19 members in the Legislative Council and 38 members in the Assembly. In 1906 there were 18 members in the Legislative Council and 30 in the Assembly. In 1946 the number of members of this honourable Chamber increased to 19 and has remained so, whereas in 1958 the number of members of the Assembly increased to

35. So there has been a degree of minor fluctuation but change in numbers is certainly not unprecedented.

With modern methods and means of transport and communication - telephones, cars, aeroplanes, radio and television - which make it easier for communication between the Parliament and the people there is an additional reason for a reduction in the number of members notwithstanding some increase in population.

It would save some \$500 000 per annum on salaries and allowances - a very significant amount which, with respect, I suggest could be used for better purposes. There are many matters of urgency that cannot be attended to because of lack of finance. A reduction in the number of members would free much needed money to be used for quite urgent purposes.

And, of course, the Government has embarked on other cost-cutting measures to try to control the very large deficit. I totally support the freeze of salaries of honourable members of Parliament for 12 months. I also support the withdrawal of the subsidy for dining facilities. In these times, when so many members of the community are in dire need, I think it is not appropriate for members of Parliament to receive subsidies for their meals. It is appropriate for them to set an example of having their salaries frozen. I am very pleased to have the opportunity of supporting such measures.

I hope the Government will go further and that the ministers will also set additional examples in the hope that the community will follow. I am surprised that no action has so far been taken to change the basis of the allocation of ministerial cars in these times of need. The honourable member for Meander was quite correct in what he said, by way of criticism, of the use of ministerial cars. The Government, when elected, terminated employment of ministerial staff and then set about reappointing some of them and appointing others as it saw fit. I suggest that the Government take similar action in relation to ministerial cars. Apart from the Premier and the Deputy Premier, each of whom has an enormous work-load, I would like to see the Government withdraw the cars and make them available only when reasonably required. I would like to see a car pool established, rather than a car allocated to each minister with a driver of his own. The expense can no longer be justified in these difficult economic times - and I am not suggesting that it could have been justified even when economic times were not as difficult as they are now.

I hope the Government will be responsive to such suggestions. That would give it the opportunity to demonstrate to the public in a very meaningful way that it is prepared to sacrifice some comforts itself in the interests of the whole community. Parliamentarians must be responsive to reasonable suggestions and to reasonable criticism and must be prepared for reform.

I now turn to the role, and in particular the future role, of the Legislative Council. I have always believed that the Legislative Council is an important House which should be retained. Equally I believe that the time has come for a number of changes. I think honourable members would be as aware as I am that there is very considerable respect in the community for this House and what it stands for, and very considerable support for its retention. But in the main I think it is seen as having a somewhat negative role - and that is not a matter of criticism, but the public probably perceive it as an

important House with a somewhat negative role. That need not be the case and often is not; I am perfectly aware of that.

I feel there is great scope for the Legislative Council to take a more positive and initiating role by the creation not merely of ad hoc committees to respond to particular issues that arise from time to time, but of a system of committees, to investigate other areas of government activity and to make recommendations in relation to policy developments, which would embrace a system whereby evidence could be taken from ministers of the Crown and also directly from public servants and those involved in the conduct of statutory authorities.

A committee system such as this could scrutinise government expenditure. Reference was made by the honourable member for Monmouth to the fact that the past Government's deficit was originally estimated to be \$13.5 million but has grown to some \$40 million. If this Legislative Council had had a committee system which empowered committees to take evidence from ministers and public servants, it may be that the Government would not have been able to refrain from divulging the actual amount of the deficit for as long as it was able to do. In the interests of the people of Tasmania, it may have been possible to keep the amount of the deficit down to a realistic figure so that the State would not have been thrown into the economic turmoil in which it now finds itself.

Mr President, I hope consideration may be given to that. It would certainly give this House a greater role and a greater say in the government of this State. In my view, the House is well equipped to take a greater role in that area and this State would be much better off if steps were taken to make that possible.

I believe the Legislative Council should retain its present powers, including the power to block supply, if in its wisdom this honourable Chamber saw fit to take that action. But I believe equally strongly that it is a corollary that, if the Legislative Council took the grave step of blocking supply, the members of this Council should also face the electors.

I believe any future redistributions involving Legislative Council boundaries should be conducted by an independent body and not by a body comprising a committee of members of the Legislative Council, as was the case with the last redistribution and probably with others. No matter how highly motivated the members of such a committee might be, self-interest must, at least in the public perception, seem to be of overriding importance.

I feel the term of members of the Legislative Council needs to be looked at. Personally I consider a four-year term for members of Parliament to be the optimum term. I believe parliaments throughout our nation need to look at fixing the term for parliaments so that everybody knows when the next election is to be and so that no government can manipulate the timing of an election. I think the people of Australia generally, and certainly the people of this State, become heartily sick of elections, particularly when they are premature and unexpected and particularly when they happen with greater frequency than is needed. I believe the time has come for the terms of the Assembly to be fixed in the same way as municipal elections and

elections for the Legislative Council, so that everybody, particularly members of the public, knows exactly when he is going to be required to elect a government.

The Legislative Council has been subject to a number of changes over the years and the terms have been varied. Initially, in 1856, the term for members of this honourable Chamber was three years. In 1859 it was changed to six years and has remained so since. It was not until 1921, of course, that women became eligible for election and in 1928 voting was made compulsory. Surprisingly, perhaps, it was not until 1967 that full adult suffrage was achieved, but this State was ahead of at least one other State in bringing the full weight of democracy into the upper House elections. So there have been changes over the years in many ways and I hope that very serious consideration will be given to contemporary changes.

Mr President, reference was made by the honourable member for Newdegate to the plight of disabled persons in particular instances. Quite correctly he referred in a critical way to the fact that the Federal Government continues to charge import duties on the import of wheelchairs. I join with him in his criticism and in his call for some action for such import duty to be removed. I consider it is unconscionable for any government to make money at the expense of disabled people who are endeavouring to make lighter the effects of the disabilities from which they unfortunately suffer. I feel the Federal Government needs to reassess its policy in that area very quickly and to remove those import duties.

To a lesser extent the same type of situation exists in our own State, where people who have the misfortune to require the use of motorised wheelchairs need to register them and are called upon to pay a fee for registration and third-party insurance. The amount involved is much smaller than the amount of the import duty but the principle remains the same, because the State Government continues to receive money at the expense of people who are disabled and who are trying to do something to reduce the effect of their disabilities.

I turn to the question of tourism. This provides much hope for the future of our State but it will be very difficult to promote tourism to the fullest extent whilst we have the present system of penalty rates and overtime rates. They are helping in a very significant way to retard development of the tourist industry. There are so many people of enterprise and initiative in Tasmania who would welcome the opportunity to provide meals and services to tourists at weekends but who cannot afford to do so because of the crippling extra amounts which they would need to pay their employees if they did so. I hope that common sense will prevail and that union leaders who have the power to influence decisions in this area will be prepared to co-operate with the Government and employers, with a view to removing the penalties on employers employing people at weekends. A sensible solution to that would give a much needed boost to tourism in the State.

Also if we are to develop tourism to its maximum potential there needs to be regularity of both air and sea transport. Much work needs to be done in industrial relations to reduce the amount of disruption which has caused so many problems to the citizens of this State and to tourists. Also there is scope for the Government to invest more in tourism. The New Zealand Government has done this very effectively by establishing THC hotels in remote areas and by being prepared to subsidise them.

I turn to the question of deregulation mentioned on page 5 of His Excellency's address. The Government is to be commended for appointing a minister for deregulation. It is important for much of the red tape to be taken out of the dealings members of the public have with government departments and for the removal of unnecessary, time-consuming and expensive duplication. One almost needs a diploma and an enormous amount of patience to tolerate the procedures which need to be followed in processing many matters involving dealings with government departments. Rules should not hinder but they should be made to help those dealing with the departments.

Mr President, the last topic upon which I wish to speak is that of patriotism. This extends beyond Tasmania and throughout our nation. Sadly there is a lack of patriotism in our country and of course that includes our State. In this country we have a quality of life which is the envy of people in most other countries. We have an abundance of natural resources and great potential but, sadly, many opportunities are being thrown away by thoughtlessness on the part of an increasing number of people who unfortunately are motivated too much by self-interest and who have little or no awareness of the effect their actions have on their country.

There is a widespread, growing and disturbing tendency nowadays for people to want higher wages and salaries, to quite an unreasonable extent in many cases, and a similar desire for people to work fewer hours, to have more and longer holidays, and to have extra remunerations such as a 17.5 per cent holiday loading. The fact is that with these benefits, many of them unreasonable, there is a reduced capacity for employers to employ the same number of people. So those who are successful in achieving better conditions, higher pay, more holidays and fewer working hours, often achieve those at the expense of the jobs of their former colleagues. Not only does there seem to be a lack of sufficient awareness of that but there seems to be an almost complete unawareness of the problems that are caused to people who lose jobs because their former colleagues are getting better conditions. Our country cannot continue to afford this situation.

It is interesting to draw comparisons in attitudes developing in Australia with those in countries such as America, Japan, Germany and most of the Asian countries where people work not merely to benefit themselves but with a highly developed consciousness and desire to benefit their nation by their efforts. They have an obvious interest and pride in strengthening their nation and working hard for it - not merely for themselves.

The national attitudes which are becoming increasingly prevalent in Australia are increasing the gap between those people who have and those people who have not. Unless we take stock of the situation as a nation as a matter of some urgency and unless our leaders draw attention to the decline caused by these matters, it will be too late to save our country from irreparable and irretrievable damage. Twenty years ago there was little consciousness of the need to be interested in conservation, even 10 to 15 years ago there was little awareness of the desirability of preserving old, particularly historic, buildings. But attitudes relating to the environment and to the preservation of old buildings, for example, have developed. As a nation we need to work very hard, and quickly, to develop patriotism and highly-motivated national

attitudes to eliminate as far as possible self-interest as the main motivating force in the lives of Australians.

Mr President and honourable members, I look forward to working with you in the interests of my constituents, in the interests of the people of Tasmania, in the interests of our fine State and in the interests of our great nation. Thank you.