

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Resumed from 12 March 1986 (page 26)

Mr BATT (Denison - Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Speaker, we do not seem to have a great number of members of the Government present so I am not quite sure whether I should move the adjournment of the House until such time as members opposite would care to participate because there is no point in the Opposition's running the House. Alternatively we might choose to absent some of our members so that we have a quorum call. Perhaps those ministers who are here might indicate which way they would like us to proceed, because we do not intend to have a situation where we are pursuing the business of the House and members opposite - who have just as much obligation to the Parliament as we do - are not fulfilling their obligation. If the minister would indicate what he would like me to do I might ask our members to absent themselves so we can proceed with the quorum call.

Mr Roger Groom - It's your call.

Quorum formed.

Mr BATT - I would indicate that, should the Government not maintain its numbers in the House, the Opposition will not do its job for it.

Let me proceed by offering the customary acknowledgment of the role of the Crown, a recognition of the proper fulfilment of those responsibilities by the Governor and our appreciation of the Governor's speech.

Let me further go on to express my welcome to those new members of the Parliament, in particular those two who have but recently both moved and seconded the Address-in-Reply. It is my wish, as I have already indicated, that this House should be used as a place where reasonable ideas can be proposed and debated. To illustrate my enthusiasm for this concept - which, as we know, has been frequently dishonoured in the past - I want to take up matters which have been raised both by the mover of the motion and by the seconder. I hope their contributions will not simply be wafted into the air but that they may be the subject of debate in this House both now and in the future. I hope the member for Bass, Dr Madill, might be encouraged in relation to his contribution and that his colleague who seconded the motion might be encouraged also.

Let me take up Dr Madill's comments in relation to the George Town proposal - and let me not take them up in a partisan manner. We assume he is an interested and intelligent contributor; it would be foolish to assume otherwise. So let me address the House on this matter and perhaps he will have an opportunity of reflecting on it.

In relation to the George Town proposal, an amount of \$400 000 has been allocated. The question is whether this \$400 000 is to be usefully utilised. It is a significant sum. The first point I would make is that it is relieving the Commonwealth Government of the responsibility for providing that money for the people of Tasmania and so, rather unusually, the State Government has undertaken the responsibility to relieve the Commonwealth of some expenditure.

Secondly, the \$400 000 is to be allocated for but one year only; after that time the exercise is over and there is no residual benefit. That would seem to me to spell out two deficiencies in the scheme.

Thirdly, the scheme depends on some assumption - in the circumstances of George Town I believe an heroic and erroneous assumption - that part-time employment will be found. That is also unlikely and therefore the three points about the scheme are marks against it.

One may, on the other hand, take an alternative program. I remind members opposite that this Opposition has a position of being always positive and we have in fact been positive in relation to this matter. We propose that this \$400 000 - I repeat, a

substantial amount of money - should be allocated in order to attract an industry. We do not necessarily need to have the whole of the \$400 000, but surely it is not beyond the wit or the capacity of this Government to allocate that \$400 000 in such a way that it attracts an industry to George Town which is likely to employ, on a permanent basis, more than the 100 two-day equivalents, therefore making a permanent contribution to George Town rather than the obvious waste of money involved at the moment.

Secondly, I would like to take up the matter raised by the member for Braddon, Mr Rundle, concerning the Australian debt. Clearly Australia has a debt servicing problem. It would be useful however if the member endeavoured to address his mind to the contribution Tasmania has made and is making to that major debt servicing problem. As I remember the statistics, they indicate that the per capita indebtedness of Tasmania is twice the national average. So again, in what is in effect my maiden speech for this occasion, I make the point that, as members of Parliament, we always ought to take the opportunity of participating in debate rather than lightly disregarding or not listening to contributions made by any member, no matter how new or of what background.

This underlines my own considered view, which I have already expressed, of the importance of improving the image of the Parliament and the procedures as they are conducted here. Might I say that the impression I have gained is that this improvement is already taking place, and it is taking place for three reasons: the first is that there is a large number of new members in the House, many of whom come from backgrounds where childish behaviour would appear to be totally inappropriate; the second is that the House, at this stage of its proceedings, must listen to a number of maiden speeches which in themselves inhibit childish activity; and the third is that, as my colleague, the Deputy Leader, illustrated today in question time, the Opposition has indicated that it will continually pursue with the Speaker the proper behaviour of people in this House.

Let me add to that, Mr Speaker, that your own determination to ensure an improvement of standards is noted and appreciated, but let us not imagine that the task before us is particularly easy. We know that public opinion surveys indicate that members of Parliament are rated on a lower scale of appreciation and approval than almost any other profession and that the performance of the Parliament is in the public perception - and I ask members to go out, ask their friends and neighbours and talk to people in the street to hear their impressions - that this is a place of irresponsible activity. We will change that between us all. The Opposition will clearly be taking and wishing to take a lead in this matter and I think we have substantially won the point for us all.

As the new Leader of the Opposition, let me take this opportunity to indicate how we will run our part of the show. We will be emphatically positive. It is more fun to be so, as it is more fun, attractive and more interesting to be participating in a debate where one can come up with sensible proposals and have them discussed rather than to be involved in an atmosphere and an attitude which diminishes dignity.

So in the interests of being positive, over the past two weeks the Deputy Leader and I have been touring the State and meeting people in their workplaces and in their shopping centres and through knocking on doors. The Labor Party is going back to the people. I might say that on the basis of our last results we need to do something.

It has been a very fruitful exercise. Wherever we went we were greeted with the comment that it was good to see the Opposition coming out with constructive ideas and constructive policies. So far we have proposed an industrial development program for George Town. We have called for assistance for orchardists affected by the failure of Bestpak. We have suggested a funding arrangement to get the upgrading of Wynyard Airport finally under way. We have supported tourist initiatives on the west coast and given our support to Mount Lyell. We have called for urgent government action to improve accommodation for students at the Goulbourn Street Primary School and we have suggested - as yet there has been no response - that a hospitality college be established in Launceston. I was in a position to establish the one in Hobart which has had a useful impact on our tourist industry. One in Launceston is overdue.

We will continue to put forward positive proposals; in fact we emphatically make the point that we hope the Government of Tasmania will be improved by the Government's listening from time to time and itself taking a positive attitude towards the proposals which come from the Opposition. There is nothing horrendous about that.

As an opposition, over the next four years our obligation, our commitment, our political interest, our own personal requirement is that we emphasise jobs again and again. Although the Premier was in a position to indicate a number of activities in which the Government was involved, the supplementary question should have been, 'And in spite of all that why is it not working?' On today's figures we have the second worst unemployment figures in Australia. There is no indication that things are improving. In Tasmania we are in a worse position than we were this time last year and we are part of an economy which is clearly heading downhill.

It is very difficult for the Federal Government to come to grips with the overriding factors affecting our economy, and I will come to that in a moment. We have one in ten people unemployed. One in three of our young people is unemployed. That is an indication of a moral failure because unemployment is a moral question to begin with. Secondly, it is a question of efficiency. If ten people are rowing an economic canoe and one of them is slacking or not involved or cannot be involved, the other nine have to work so much harder, and in this State economy that is exactly the position we have.

The figures are not an indication of success; they are an indication of failure. If the Government can indicate that it is content with this situation that would surely be a pattern of insensitivity.

So whatever we are doing now in relation to unemployment in this State it is not good enough, or we are not doing enough of it or we are not doing the right thing. So the Opposition will properly direct the Government's attention continually towards the problem of unemployment and the solving of it.

Let us begin in this House by seeking to examine the problem. Of course we have but a portion of the major problems facing the Australian economy. We need to examine those before we can have an understanding of our own problems. We have an overlarge external debt - both private and public - in Australia. We have insufficient export earnings to service the debt and this puts pressure on the Australian dollar and makes the debt problem even worse. There is price pressure on all the commodities which Australia sells. In fact we are dependent to the extent that 60 per cent of our total export earnings is in fact from agricultural products, and they are particularly subject to downward price pressure. We have a declining manufacturing industry and we have an extremely limited population growth; in fact, we would be at a diminishing population if it were not for our migration program - which is in itself a limited program.

Tasmania has exactly the same problems but it has some which are even more dominating in this economy. We are an economy dependent upon farming, minerals, mineral refining and forest products - including paper - and they are all subject to exposure and external pressures. Almost none of the products produced in Tasmania is protected naturally or in any significant tariff way and they are all subject to increased downward price pressure.

Let me illustrate by the example of our recent tour. In relation to textiles in this State, we have an Industries Assistance Commission inquiry which is threatening the viability of some of our textile manufacturers. If we move along the road from Launceston to Comalco Aluminium (Bell Bay) Ltd, we have a situation where the price of aluminium has dropped substantially - I think to about a twelve-year low - and indications are that more aluminium is coming onto the market. There is a world over-supply of aluminium and it would be a brave prediction indeed to forecast when that slump will change for the better. Again we move to Associated Pulp and Paper Mills Ltd - itself subject to an IAC inquiry and to increased competition within Australia. We move on to Mount Lyell - and we all know the history of Mount Lyell and the precarious nature of employment in that area; many of the tin miners are surviving at this moment only

because of the intervention of the Federal Government. Renison itself is in a very uncertain market situation. We then move on to Rosebery - and we know the story of the pressure on zinc prices; they are currently very low.

I make the point again: can anybody point to an area of economic activity in Tasmania where one can be optimistic - surely not in farming, manufacturing or mineral refining. It is difficult indeed not to be somewhat cautious - if not depressed - when we examine the structural future of Tasmania. All the industries which make up the major employers in this State are subject to job-shedding and again I make the point that this is but an illustration of what is happening in Australia as a whole. The Opposition's policy - and contribution - will be to direct the attention of the Government and the people of Tasmania to a totally new economic direction because it is clear, as I said a moment ago, that whatever we are doing presently is unsatisfactory because we are not getting the results. So let us call our new economic policy a 'new directions' policy because indeed we do need new directions.

Let me bid farewell to the basis of our past economic philosophy, the program of hydro-industrialisation. It served Tasmania well. It was a brave program which certainly provided jobs and economic growth in its time, but the hydro-industrialisation era of Tasmania is at an end as an effective creator of jobs. Major power users are not now readily available. When they are, they are not large employers of labour; they do not have the security they previously had and they require such an enormous investment of capital in a country such as Australia - which is short of capital - that the likelihood of Tasmania being able to rest easily on a continuous program of hydro-industrialisation is very remote indeed. It would be foolish, irresponsible and indeed short-sighted to propose that we should continue to depend upon that direction for our welfare. As I say, it has served us well in the past.

We are not proposing - no one should - that there should be any diminution of our enthusiasm to support and, if possible, extend our basic industries. But it is clear by looking at our basic industries that they will all need massive injections of capital and that the job creation will be minimal. So we must indeed look to new directions.

Let me incidentally make the point that the Government has received \$17.7 million in revenue from the forest industry, and it costs \$16.3 million to run the Forestry Commission. On those rather simplistic figures, even the forest industry is not the creator of great wealth for the Government that we could expect or hope it to be.

The other industry - if we can describe it that way - which Tasmania has had as the cornerstone of its prosperity has been Commonwealth payments to Tasmania. Let me frankly admit that successive Tasmanian governments - and most of them have been Labor - have been extremely skilled at milking the Commonwealth properly. I do not withdraw from that, but we certainly have done very well on a per capita basis over a period and we certainly have established a sound public sector on that basis. It is quite clear that one cannot talk about the problem of the national debt and the difficulty of servicing it and, at the same time, argue that all the States ought to have the unlimited capacity to increase that public debt. There is an irresponsibility involved in that argument.

We will be involved in maximising Tasmania's advantage, let that be clear. But let it also be clear that the way to prosperity does not lie in the Commonwealth's borrowing money, nor does it lie in Tasmania's being always propped up by Commonwealth payments. We will get as much as we can; the Government can rely upon that. We will help; we will be involved. But, because of the fragility of all these basic structures, we need the new directions in our economic policies.

So let me turn to the new directions. Let none of us be negative about this. Let none of us forget the vast resources of Tasmania - \$1 billion revenue. Few businesses in Australia have that capacity - and of course much of that income and much of those loan funds are in fact discretionary income. There is the possibility to vary that expenditure to advantage Tasmania substantially. We do not need to be unimaginative. We have people who are skilled and energetic, we have the resources, we have the environment and we have the political stability sought after by many people throughout the world.

What is needed to create an economic burst in Tasmania which will have some prospect of resolving an increasingly fragile economic structure? I have had the opportunity in a number of studies of examining this and of course what one needs, apart from the basic resources and the money, is the political will. I do not mean the will of only the Government, I mean the will of all the people of Tasmania who are determined that things will in fact be different - those who are determined that they will not be content with the immorality of one person in ten being unemployed; those who will not be content with the fact that so many of our young people, by sheer necessity, are driven from Tasmania; and those who will not be content with second-rate economic performances. Therefore we need to inspire the population of Tasmania with the fact new directions in economic policy can be created - and we need, from our side of the House, to inspire the Government as well.

We need imagination. Why should we not be different? Through the way in which we exercise our minds and the way in which we debate these matters within this Chamber, why should we not have the imagination to do different things and utilise our resources in a different manner? There are examples around the world of some countries without resources, and without any of the normal things one would expect, which in fact achieve a standard of living second to none. Singapore now has a higher per capita standard of living than New Zealand and in time it will surpass Australia - as will so many of the developing countries because they have utilised what they have, rather than being content to be exporters only of raw materials. I repeat, the problem facing Australia faces Tasmania all the time. We do not need to be inhibited in any way by the apparent lack of productivity which is the effect of the apparent lack of marketplace alertness which has affected the Australian economy as a whole.

We need to make a commitment - a more substantial commitment than we have ever made before, backed by imagination and our political will - to make this State a place of great quality products and we need to be determined to find a market niche for those products. There are many examples of where companies, regions and countries have adopted this formula and been dramatically successful.

Let me use examples. I am not talking pie in the sky or something that cannot be done; I am talking about things which are currently being done in Tasmania. During the election campaign I was at Richardson's Meat Industries Ltd. Richardson's Meat Industries Ltd, in the northern suburbs of Hobart, has been successful in winning a contract for selling Tasmanian quality lamb to Switzerland. When one sells into those markets he sells at the top of the market and he gets the best price. There is always, around the world, premium for quality. And Richardson's Meat Industries Ltd also sells packaged meat to the supermarkets of West Germany. The company is looking for people to put on; it is short of employees.

Another example in the same region is Moorilla Estate which is known to so many people for producing quality wine and selling it to West Germany and Britain at eight times the average price of wine sold nationally in Australia.

Let me move further to Sheridan Textiles which is selling quality products at a premium price throughout Australia and in Singapore - selling to an international market.

Let me go to furniture and the many manufacturers who have decided that they have a niche in the market. We have not begun in that activity. Let us dust off the report on woodskills and manufacturing which was produced some years ago and reconsider using our timber for high price, high quality products. The Japanese are not stupid; they do not cut their timber down for woodchips.

Let me go to tourism. We have discovered tourism but comparatively recently in this State and, frankly, we have a long way to go before we have a pattern of international tourism development.

But what next? I have noted with enthusiasm the Government's announcement of an export development task force. It is not quite as exciting as I would like. One has a suspicion that, since I have been hammering this for some weeks during the election campaign, it may have arisen as a response to my own enthusiasm. But that is good; I am pleased if that should be so.

We have a Tasmanian export label which is also a good idea. I hope there will be the opportunity during this debate for someone to tell the House about this export label because this is where the debate ought to occur. If it does not occur in this House - and I am now addressing myself to backbenchers on the other side - there is very little point in those members being here, apart from numbers fodder; but if they can come into the House and have debate they are fulfilling a worthwhile role, as are we in the Opposition. If we can make contributions and therefore seek to influence what happens in this State by the quality of our ideas, we will not be wasting our four years - and it appears we have to wait that long - because we will be satisfied that we have really made a contribution.

But let us look at the Tasmanian export label. Consider, in simple commercial terms, the enormous impact an export label makes on the saleability of so many products familiar to us. Yesterday I think I had a Pierre Cardin shirt and tie. Why do I pay a premium price - because of the name. One can go into supermarkets and find time and time again that we are all subject to purchasing by name. Around the world people pay premium prices because they are persuaded by the attractiveness of the name. We have a magnificent selling advantage in the name of Tasmania. The very struggle over the Franklin made the name internationally recognisable. We have attached to that name the romanticism, if you like, of a south-sea island. We have a long history. We have a beautiful environment.

If we want to sell this island and any product from it and we have the opportunity of establishing a brand name, please let us not treat the matter as though it is somehow or other simply a light-hearted thing because it is at the core of our future commercial viability. Therefore let us think large; let us think imaginatively about what we should do with a Tasmanian brand name. One might even think of a national or international competition. One might even think about doing it on a grand scale so that when we establish the Tasmanian brand name we have a symbol - a flag, if you like, under which our future commercial enterprises, public and private, can sail - which is truly exciting and significant and gets all the Tasmanian people behind the particular project.

We will support suggestions and we commend to the Government that it be a little imaginative. The symbol should be the basis of identification for our products, promotion, packaging and labelling. For example, we have Tasmanian wood products; Tasmanian honey; Tasmanian health foods; and flavouring and essences - on which I was able to do so much work when I was here before. For example, we also have processed fruit - Tasmania already has a name there. Let us not forget that IXL became an international company from Hobart. We have vegetables, and we are already significant in that field. We have 20 per cent of the national frozen vegetable market. We should improve and increase that capacity but we should have it under a Tasmanian brand name.

Then there is angora wool, other forms of wool, fashion garments and processed fish products. Surely our imagination is not so slack that we cannot, all of us, provide a capacity to search out and find products which will make us truly significant in world terms.

As part of this constructive approach, I am happy to tell the House that I have arranged for a special trade seminar, aimed at promoting awareness of export opportunities among business people, to be held in Hobart. It is anticipated that the seminar, to be conducted by the senior officers from the Federal Department of Trade, will be held in early May. Topics to be covered will include marketing, export incentives and product development.

I assume that representatives of the Tasmanian Government will be present - it need not have the only ideas itself, it can participate in ideas which come from the Opposition - and I will be delighted if the Government would participate in this. The development of initiatives to put the Tasmanian economy on a sounder footing and to overcome the State's chronic unemployment situation is obviously too important to be the concern of only one political Party and it is too important for any initiative to be lost for reasons of Party politics.

We will also be proposing - and members will perhaps recall that I proposed this during the election campaign - a Tasmanian international marketing organisation, TasTrade, to coordinate our exports and marketing throughout the world. It should be set up as a statutory authority to enable it to operate on a government-to-government level. TasTrade could give a major impetus to our export efforts. In cooperation with big marketing organisations such as Charles Davis Ltd and the international trading company, Heine Bros - and Michael Heine has indicated that he is delighted to help - TasTrade could take us into the forefront of world trade as an exporter of quality products. What is needed is nothing but will and if we do show a willingness to experiment and to think more in terms of Tasmania's export potential I can give the Government the assurance that it will receive the full support of the Labor Party.

Another initiative is Tasmania as an education centre. It may well be that members around the House have had the opportunity of looking at the Jackson committee of inquiry into Australia's overseas aid. It so happened that I was one of the five members of that committee and had an opportunity of participating, and helping in particular to write the chapter on education as an export industry.

I happen to have an enthusiasm about this. The University of Tasmania has 5 500 students. It is not a sufficient number to make a truly viable university. Already many come from overseas. There have been some 200 000 students graduating from Australian universities since the late 1940s. There are some 2 million students around the world, not only from developing countries but from North America and from the United Kingdom and Europe, who have developed the pattern of taking one year of their course in a foreign university. We have the enormous advantage that we are English speaking. We are linked with the major universities in the world and we have an opportunity of attracting a number of those students to Australia.

I commend to the Government that it look at the Jackson Committee's report. I guess the best equivalent of having students studying in Tasmania and making an economic contribution is the tourist industry but these tourists stay here for a full year and employ Tasmanians to teach and supply them. I cannot imagine why this opportunity has not been taken up. I suggest that the first step would be for the Government to join with the university, with the State Institute of Technology and other interested parties in drawing up a detailed submission to the Federal Government.

Let me mention again the centre for cold region technology. This is a matter I have already announced. I have the support of the Federal Minister for Science, Barry Jones, who has agreed to fund a consultant. He has asked me to chair a steering committee to see how this can advantage Tasmania and I will be starting to conduct that feasibility study quite soon. It is but one other example where imagination can be brought to bear to ensure that Tasmania has an opportunity of utilising in this case

its geographic position so that we can take advantage of what will clearly be an increased opportunity and an increased involvement of many countries in the world in seeking to explore, at this stage, and examine Antarctica.

Let me conclude my contribution this afternoon by mentioning some other positive proposals. Let me emphatically say that members can count on this as being a preliminary canter because we will pursue these matters and ensure that the Government takes some action about them. I have noticed that there seems to be a remarkable lack of creativity on the Government's side at this stage but maybe it has not been popular previously with the Government. We hope we will now see a different position.

What about the development of a State economic plan, the formation of a Tasmanian economic development advisory council? What about an emphasis on technology development? I brought with me the samples of State development plans: Victoria - a State development plan; Western Australia - a State development plan; South Australia's economic future for the next five years. Where is Tasmania's economic plan? Do we imagine that we do not need to plan, that we do not need to have a document which stimulates our minds? It might be valuable if the Government would indicate when it proposes to start on such a proposal. Ad hoc, accidental decision-making is no longer effective for our new directions policy.

I want to propose that the Government establish a Tasmanian development advisory council comprised of heads of some of Australia's most successful commercial enterprises to examine ways in which we could expand our industrial base and create new jobs.

There is no difficulty with this. Tasmania has a favourable image with many people who are at the head of major commercial and industrial organisations. Many of those people are anxious and willing to encourage enterprise, to encourage State governments to pursue development policies. They are willing to make their time available. They are persons of influence in economic decision-making. There can be no disadvantage in utilising them for Tasmania.

Let me make my final point, again illustrating what can be done and what has not been done. I think the minister might learn if he were to listen rather than to chatter.

Mr Braid - When you tell us something we don't already know we'll listen to you.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. The honourable Leader of the Opposition has the Floor.

Mr BATT - I want to draw attention to the management and investment company program launched in 1984. It allows investors in approved high technology activities to claim a full taxation deduction for their investment in licensed management and investment companies. The reaction in most States has been enthusiastic with a number of new companies being formed to take advantage of a very remarkable new initiative. The response in this State has been nil. No State government support has been forthcoming. There has been no action on behalf of the Government, even after I raised the issue for the first time last October. This program goes to the heart of the type of industry Tasmania needs - high technology developments producing goods for export both interstate and overseas.

I want the Government to respond to this. I have the documents available from Westintech, the West Australian involvement in this. I lived for some time in Western Australia. I know the people involved. Stuart Morgan, the managing director, has indicated that he would be willing and able to come to Tasmania to assist with the establishment of such a program in Tasmania. The Government need not be worried about him. Although he is a friend of mine he is a former member of the executive of the West Australian Branch of the Liberal Party, so it need not feel threatened.

But why is it that these programs are around and they are not happening? I guess the best illustration of the nature of the Government is that here we have the situation - and is it not amusing - that I have been able to indicate half a dozen programs which might be of advantage to this State. Can anybody deny that they could



be utilised? Can anybody parallel them with any programs from the Government of this time? Can anybody name one initiative proposed by the Government which is not a clone of everything that has happened in Tasmania for the past 40 years? The answer is no. We do not find the endeavour to create some sort of intellectual atmosphere where there might be a receptive audience to anybody in this community who proposes that we do it differently, that we do it better, that we use our initiative and that we use our imagination.

The danger to this State and to the economy of this State is that the Government has been elected so comfortably it is content for nothing to happen. It appears by the attitude we have here that, from its point of view, the people of this State who are unemployed are not its concern; the development of industry in this State is not its concern; the development of initiatives in this State is not its concern; and the opportunity for new directions which we propose is not its concern. I presume, from the response of the Government, that we will go on in this State without any opportunity to provide the sort of society, the sort of economy and the sort of developments which this State so desperately needs and which are so readily available if only we had the imagination, the political will and the capacity to grasp this opportunity.

I say to the Government, wake up, for goodness' sake - wake up to the opportunities which are available to the people in this State and stop being so ultimately, drearily dull.

Opposition members - Hear, hear.