

Mr CHRIS BATT (Lyons) - Mr Speaker, I welcome this opportunity on the occasion of my maiden speech, to respond to the 1987 Tasmanian Budget.

This Budget has been framed in circumstances in which the payments from the Federal Government to all States have declined. These circumstances require increased resilience and an increased determination to improve our way of life in Tasmania. The Treasurer's statement that self-reliance is a must for Tasmania is an important challenge. However it is far too easy to overlook a fundamental reality that we face as Tasmanians and to forget that the principal financial resource of this State is, and will continue to be, the receipt of Federal government funds. The size of this financial resource - the contribution that we can expect from the other people of this country - depends unavoidably on our relationship with Canberra. It depends on the ability of the Government of the day as a negotiator and as an advocate for Tasmanians.

The Treasurer's statement that we are now on our own causes me great concern. Independence has a cost and the Government must accept partial responsibility for the reduction in Federal government receipts to Tasmania over the past three years.

The most noticeable deficiency in this Budget is the lack of a clearly delineated strategy for Tasmania. Much has been said about broadening our economic base, about increased downstream processing and about more intensive production, but these objectives remain as objectives rather than realities. We are still dependent upon primary produce, upon primary and resource-based industries, and the potential for further downstream and increased value added production is high.

While we are purportedly reaching new heights in economic performance, the Government is remarkably silent on any projections regarding economic growth over the coming year. Given that there appears to have been strong growth in the Tasmanian economy over the past two years, the slowing of activity in 1986 and 1987 and the absence of projections on growth for the coming year are matters of concern.

If there were an economic strategy - one that clearly spelt out where Tasmania was going beyond 1987 - foremost in that strategy would be the objective of providing jobs for Tasmanians. The Government has stated that 18 000 jobs have been created, 5 000 since February of last year. Nevertheless I submit that such claims are of little value to the 20 000 people in the State who are unemployed. They are of little importance to the 23 per cent of people who are unemployed in the Brighton Municipality and they are little consolation to the 44.6 per cent of people who are without work in the suburb of Gagebrook. It is little consolation to the people of Tasmania who still experience the highest levels of unemployment in this country.

The Government's record on the alleviation of unemployment is not one of achievement and there is little wonder that the Government was conspicuously silent when the unemployment figures were released by the Bureau of Census and Statistics in August of this year. I believe that this silence is indicative of a lack of confidence by the Government in its own ability to reduce unemployment in this State. Indicative of this lack of confidence is an increased allocation to the Tasmanian Development Authority of some \$13 million over the next year. Nevertheless I welcome this increased allocation to an authority which has lacked the appropriate funding to have any major impact on the Tasmanian economy in the past.

Indicative also of the Government's lack of confidence in its own employment-generating capacity is the allocation of only \$4.1 million to the Tasmanian Employment Program this year. Last year the sum appropriated for this scheme was almost \$5 million. Only \$4 million of this money was actually spent. So confident is the Government in the capacity of this scheme to generate real employment, real jobs in the Tasmanian economy, that it has reduced the allocation to the Tasmanian Employment Program by \$1 million for the coming year. So confident is the Government in its own job-creation strategy that it refuses to be drawn on a long-term commitment to the Taswork scheme. Whilst the Opposition supports an extensive trial, we also hope that a full report of this trial will be tabled in this House so that we can all examine the effectiveness and the worth of the Taswork scheme.

I have observed that unemployment is rarely mentioned in this House. We seldom refer to the devastating social effects which people without work experience. We refer to the number of jobs created, to the expansion of industry or to this or that job-creation scheme but seldom do we refer to the fact that 20 000 people in Tasmania do not have jobs and do not have the ability to achieve the ambitions, desires and financial independence which most of us here take for granted.

We should take some time to reflect on the lives of those Tasmanians whose daily pursuits are simply to put enough food on the table for their families, to secure roofs over their heads and whose daily grind is a continuous search for jobs which either do not exist, for which they are not qualified or for which they do not possess the appropriate experience.

We should also take some time to reflect on the plight of our young people who comprise by far the largest proportion of those people who experience unemployment. The youth of this State, whose experience should be that of gaining skills in the work force, interacting with their peers in the work force, gaining financial independence and contributing their vitality and enthusiasm to our society, are left to the daily drudgery of searching for opportunities which simply do not exist.

The human cost of unemployment is something we must not ignore and the devastation to the lives of our young people should evoke shame in us all. We have in Tasmania two distinct groups of people: those with jobs and those without jobs. Whilst those with jobs continue to experience the benefits of the latest consumer technology, those without jobs continue to live in a society where poverty exists and where life is increasingly frustrating and mundane.

We must accept the challenge to view unemployment as a serious social problem in this State, one not to be addressed only by the broad strokes of economic policy but also by positive action for real people in need, for real people who experience poverty. The need for a government-initiated discussion involving government, unemployed people and community groups is urgent. The need to develop policy and take action to lessen the effects of unemployment is of paramount importance and I urge the Government to respond to that challenge. The link between education, training and the ability to gain employment is clear. Long-term unemployment is clearly related to a lack of competitiveness in the job market as well as to simple absence of positions.

In this State, for example, we do not train a sufficient number of nurses to fill the positions in Tasmanian hospitals. At the height of the previous tourist season there were 500 trained staff shortages in the Tasmanian tourism and hospitality industry. The recently conducted IBIS Report indicated the need for further funds to be allocated to training in this area. Further, at the recent annual general meeting of the Tasmanian Rural Industry Training Council, it was indicated that the implementation of new technology in rural areas often resulted in the importation of skilled workers from outside the area where that technology is implemented.

As I have said, the link between education, training and employment is clear. The need for a senior secondary college in the northern suburbs as a strategy against unemployment is also clear. Access to education for the people of the northern suburbs, the Derwent valley and the lower midlands is essential to the resolution of high unemployment and the lack of educational opportunities in these areas.

Tasmania's high school retention rates remain among the lowest in this country. The number of young people who complete high school is unacceptably low, as is the proportion of our young people who continue on to further education. We in this State must accept the challenge to improve the levels of participation in high school and further education to at least those comparable with the national average. This change - this improvement in the lifelong prospects of our young people - will not occur spontaneously. It will occur only as a result of positive government intervention. I call upon this Government to develop a plan directed towards resolving this problem. I call upon this Government to publish a strategy as an indication of the action and the urgency with which the Government intends

to tackle this problem. Not to meet this challenge will mean that our young people will continue to leave high school with little prospect of gaining useful employment and with diminished lifelong prospects.

I urge the Government to take up the challenge in the area of skill training in Tasmania and to respond to the important Federal government initiatives in the 1987 Federal Budget. I noted the increased allocation in the Tasmanian Budget to the Tasmanian group training scheme and I commend that response.

The thrust of the Federal Department of Employment, Education and Training is to make education and training more responsive to the needs of the labour market. Our energy should be directed towards the quality of training rather than its quantity, and we must ensure that training occurs in areas which are needed by industry and reflects changes as they occur in industry.

I have also noted the State Industrial and Commercial Training Act 1985 and the establishment of the Training Authority of Tasmania. This act has brought about much needed changes to the Tasmanian apprenticeship system and I commend those changes. Nevertheless there are some fundamental challenges to which the State Government, in cooperation with the Federal Government, must respond in the coming year. There is a need to ensure that apprenticeship and training experience in the workplace matches the theory in the classroom. Federal government funding to employers has changed so that there will now be two payments of \$1 500 - one at the beginning of training and one at the end. The purpose of this change is to improve the final quality of the training product. This action deserves State government support.

The length of training courses should become more flexible to reflect the needs of the particular skill required by industry rather than those of a predetermined or rigid academic requirement. Greater access must be provided to women who have not previously enjoyed the benefits of access to additional training and apprenticeship areas.

I urge the Government also to improve access for adults to traditional training areas so that people who find themselves unemployed as a result of structural changes in the labour market have greater access to retraining and greater avenues by which to re-enter the work force.

It is an unfortunate fact that industry in this country continues to view training not as a contribution to its resources, not as a broadening of its skill base, but as a cost. There is a need for a greater contribution by industry and the private sector to the costs of providing education and training. There is a need therefore to examine the funding structures of the technical and further education system so that the contributions of industry are more self-evident. The returns to industry from the TAFE system should reflect that industry contribution. Currently any fees or moneys provided disappear into the Consolidated Fund. A reviewed procedure that reflected contributions differently would attract more funds to the education area and allow, one would hope, a more efficient use of those existing Federal and State moneys. That is also a challenge that faces the State Government in the coming year.

The end result of education and training is that people join the work force. That is self-evident. However the activities of education at the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology, the TAFE system and the general education system work principally in an uncoordinated manner. Apart from competing for scarce funds they tend to operate independently. There is always the propensity to train too many doctors, too few nurses, too many carpenters or too few statisticians - whatever the case might be.

I believe there is a need to examine the proposition of a coordinating organisation. This organisation would provide guidelines to all of the educational and training institutions in this State with respect to the number of specific skills that are required by the State. Not only would such a body encourage a more efficient use of scarce education resources, it would help to alleviate the structural skill shortages that are experienced in the labour

market on a cyclical basis. An organisation dedicated to preventing the training of too many or too few people in a particular skill area would be of enormous benefit to Tasmania. I urge the Government to examine this proposal and to give it urgent consideration.

Finally I wish to speak about the youth of Tasmania. I could begin by discussing the problems of youth as I could discuss the problems of any other section of the community. However it would be wrong to describe a group of people in terms of its problems. Youth is simply that group of young people who are between the ages of 12 and 25. There is much that is good, there is much that is positive and there is much that young people can contribute to Tasmania.

It is important that we begin to allow young people expression and we begin to listen. Whilst our young people are full of enthusiasm and have a clear idea about their own ideals there appears to be little confidence in the world we are leaving as their legacy. Eighty per cent of young people are concerned about unemployment and 73 per cent of young people in this country are concerned about the possibility of a nuclear war.

A Commonwealth research survey in 1984 indicated the ambition to travel was more important for many of our young people than that of finding a secure job. For many young people travelling the world was important because there was no long-term expectation that this world would survive. It would appear that we have already lost contact with the future. The simple fact is that youth has lost its faith in our capacity to do our job. It is our task to restore that faith; it is our task to re-establish contact with the future.

The principal desire of young people is not that we solve their problems and not that we create policies for their benefit. Young people simply wish to be able to express their own desires, to make their own decisions and to be allowed to demonstrate their initiative. Our part is to provide the facility and, if necessary, the resources for this to occur.

Some of the modest ambitions of Tasmania's youth are to establish youth radio stations, to operate under-age discos and to establish alcohol-free hotels. These youth initiatives deserve support and recognition. It is my view that greater funding for the activities of the Youth Affairs Council of Tasmania and the Office of Youth Affairs would confer benefits not only for young people but for all Tasmanians.

I believe that we must allow young people the opportunity to demonstrate their ingenuity and their integrity. The Opposition plans to invite representatives of Tasmania's youth to meet with us here at Parliament House, not for young people to listen to us, not to determine policies on their behalf but simply to listen to them. This challenge also faces the Government.

I would like to thank members for their patience in listening to this speech. It is an honour to be here and it is a responsibility that I do not take lightly. It will be my aim to bring to the attention of this House matters of public importance, as it is my hope that I have done on this occasion. Most important, it will be my aim not to pursue those things which I see as important but to pursue those matters which those people who elected me to this place view as important. That is the purpose for which I believe this place exists.

Opposition members - Hear, hear.