

Mr PEART (Braddon) - It is with a sense of pride, honour and indeed privilege that I stand in this Chamber in the Fortieth Parliament of this State, representing the people of the north-west coast, embraced by the electorate of Braddon. I thank them for their generous support and I know their trust in me will not be misplaced.

I stand proud to be a parliamentarian and I prefer to be known as a parliamentarian; I am proud of that profession. I agree with the previous speaker that it is a noble profession and, if politics comes into it, that is simply the tactics I will use to achieve the ends I believe to be in the best interests of all Tasmanians. Whilst it is my primary obligation to represent the people of the north-west coast I am also aware, as is every member, that we are charged with the responsibility not only of managing the affairs of our island community in a sound and proper manner, but that we do so with a vision of the kind of society we believe Tasmania should be at the turn of the century.

While I would be the first to congratulate the Liberal Party and its Leader on their election victory and consequent return to Government - and after all it is really only part of fair play in any contest - I seriously question whether this Government is managing our affairs with any real vision or blueprint for the future.

His Excellency the Governor did mention the fact that his Government managed to balance the budget, despite undertaking a massive capital works program around the State. Unfortunately His Excellency failed to give any credit to the equally massive financial support given to this community by the Federal Government. In 1985, for example, \$51.6 million was allocated for roads; \$26 million for the purchase of the 'Abel Tasman'; \$27.6 million for housing; and \$43 million as a one-off grant to offset the implementation of the Grants Commission's recommendations.

However I am sensing the first signs of concern creeping over the furrowed brows of members opposite; I am hearing the first sounds of concern about our Tasmanian economy creeping into their utterances in this House. It began when His Excellency warned us about the possible - and I stress the word 'possible' - deterioration of the national economy and it followed in the voices of the mover and the seconder of the motion for the Address-in-Reply, with both members voicing provocative criticisms of national economic trends. In other words, I believe this Government is already planting the seeds of blame for what may be a possible - and again I stress the word 'possible' - economic crisis as its term of office unfolds. It is also a little disappointing that this Government has been so eager to take all the credit and yet now is beginning to shed the blame for any possible financial crisis upon the hand that feeds it, the Federal Government.

Not quite four years ago, this Government asked the Tasmanian people to vote for jobs: jobs that would come from good economic management. His Excellency reiterated this Government's pledge to generate the jobs Tasmanians need and said that this Government's first priority is jobs. Not quite four years ago, 17 800 Tasmanians were out of work; I quote from the Premier's policy speech, 'Nearly a whole city of unemployed'. Today 19 400 Tasmanians are out of work despite the increase in 1985 - which I recognise - in the number employed. Not quite four years ago almost one in every ten of our work force was out of a job, and today the Tasmanian unemployment rate is higher than it was in May 1982. Nearly four years ago half of the future hope of this State - our young - was unemployed. According to our Premier, at that time one-third of our teenagers did not have a job. Today the situation is no better, despite the promises and pledges and the massive capital works programs. This Government confronts a massive problem in youth unemployment. Indeed this Parliament has as its major priority - and I include members on both sides of the House - the challenge of working towards possible solutions. I accept that this Government gives full recognition to the problem - but it has done that for the past four years!

The Leader of the Opposition has already presented several employment-generating strategies to this House. I have no doubt we will continue to make a positive and significant contribution towards the mitigation of this problem because the solutions need to be creative, innovative and founded essentially in the private sector. I hope this Government has the good sense and political courage to take on board strategies and

ideas generated from this side of the House and I am pleased to see its recognition that solutions do not lie solely in employment programs. Such programs as the Community Employment Program, Priority One and even the proposed Tasmanian training and employment package can provide only valuable training and paid work experience - nothing else. In reality involvement in such programs remains a poor second to permanent, full-time employment for those who desire it. That is what our young people want in life - a job.

There is little doubt that our community is experiencing the social and economic impact of the technological revolution and that the role of work, its nature and life significance are being transformed. It may well be that the traditionally accepted notion of a full-time, five-day-a-week job for nearly 50 years is now an anachronism. We may well be facing a situation in which young people enter the work force at a later stage in life and retire from it at a much earlier age than ever before.

Already we are experiencing a rapid increase in the availability of casual work at the expense of full-time employment and we are experiencing slow growth in the availability of permanent part-time work. Young people may never experience the one permanent job during their working lives. Their experience may be in many jobs, involving retraining or a combination of both. Flexibility may characterise the nature of work in the year 2000.

We may have to recognise the right of a young person not to elect to work in a traditional pattern. Perhaps we should question our blind faith in the traditional work ethic which has governed our society for so long. As leaders, perhaps we need to harness the vitality and talent of our youth by recognising and valuing other forms of human endeavour within our community and towards its betterment. But even I am concerned about the sheer waste of youthful vitality, potential talent and human resources when I see young people without a sense of direction, purpose or belonging and, most of all, without a sense of worth. All of these traditionally have been provided by a job, for it is 'the job' which tends to define who we are and what we are about - at least on the surface. If one meets informally at a party somebody whom he has not met before, or whom he has not met for some time, the first question is often, 'What do you do?', and that is what defines what one is about in the initial sense. But images and acceptability are just as important to young people and to the retrenched family man as they are to members of this Chamber.

In his first speech in the first session of the Fortieth Parliament of this State, the Leader of the Opposition clearly demonstrated that the application of technology is eroding the employment base of our traditional industry. For example, take the great north-west coast operation in the heart of Burnie, Associated Pulp and Paper Mills Ltd. Since the early 1970s the Burnie mill has been forced to reduce its work force from around 4 500 to just over 1 300 in order to remain competitive. It cannot be blamed for that; the trend is evident elsewhere. As the Government and we in opposition recognise, this State needs to attract new industrial and manufacturing operations, especially to those regions experiencing high unemployment. With few exceptions we have not been very successful.

Perhaps it is also time to utilise the resources we do have to generate wealth. Tasmanian timbers are unique and unequalled in quality. Not only should they be harvested within sustainable yields - and I was pleased to hear the Minister for Forests mention that we are close to reaching a sustainable yield on our crown lands - but they should be processed and marketed - for example, as premium, high-quality furniture; as premium, high-quality decorative timber; and as premium, high-quality craft products.

It amazes me that we have been unable to establish processing plants to add value to our mineral resources. If only we could encourage Aberfoyle, for example, to process the mineral extracts from the rich Hellyer deposits in the north west we may ease the chronic unemployment situation in that region of our State. But I dare say that economic viability is more important than human dignity when corporate profit is at stake.

Of course we do have one major resource with enormous potential for wealth generation - our wilderness, our rainforests, our national parks and our national estate. I was delighted last night to hear the Minister for Education and the Arts talk about the beauty of this State. Indeed the member for Bass, Dr Madill, is quite right in his recognition of:

'... the importance of tourism as second to none in Tasmania in the long term.'

But I feel that our mainland visitors come to this island to experience its unique natural and historical heritage which must be preserved, cared for and sensitively managed for mainland and international visitors to this island - and of course for my own children. Only then will we have a tourist product we can market as 'proudly Tasmanian'.

I support the member for Braddon, Mr Rundle, in his call for the development of other tourist products throughout Tasmania. I mention 'Highfield' to him, that historic home which watches over Stanley, one of our most attractive fishing villages. I think the mining history of Tasmania's west coast has tremendous potential for tourist development. I have often dreamed of a steam train running along the north-west coast. I remember my mother taking me as a child along the west coast in a little train - it was on the Emu Bay Railway line from Burnie to Rosebery. My memory and vision of that still remain strong. That, I think, is a possibility for tourism development in the future.

To me the crown jewel of our State's natural environment is that magnificent trout fishery within the lake district of our central plateau. I believe our trout fishery is among the best in the world, a view shared by anglers from all parts of the world who are regularly lured into the highlands by the wily Tasmanian trout. Herein lies a magnificent tourist asset, a unique resource in this country in this State which, if properly marketed, can generate even more wealth than it already does. But we need a sensitive management plan for the region - a plan which manages people, not just fish - and the careful development of accommodation and other facilities.

As a fisherman I - and, I am sure, other members in this House who fish, such as Mr Robson and Dr Bates - meet mainland tourists who are here trout fishing. They spend a great deal of money getting here, on equipment and advice offered by our fishing guides. One of their problems is that they do not have anywhere to stay. Our accommodation is poor and I think there is tremendous potential for private developers to make a buck.

The trout fishery itself is extremely well managed by Dr Robert Sloane, the Inland Fisheries Commissioner, and his expert staff of biologists and inspectors - often on a shoestring budget. I know the Minister for Inland Fisheries, Mr Hodgman, is well aware of that fact.

I hope the minister will fight for increased funds for necessary research to improve and extend further this wild water fishery. I hope the Inland Fisheries Commission will consider research into trout behaviour under specific conditions in the central highlands. Then I think my fellow anglers and I may well be better rewarded than we are now when we make our excursions into the central highlands.

Within this vital service industry of tourism lies potential for development, for job and wealth generation limited only by our vision and our political will. The potential for job and wealth generation also lies in our education system, of which the university and the State Institute of Technology are a part. The concept of Tasmania as a centre for excellence which can be marketed may not be new but it has been raised as a strong possibility by the Leader of the Opposition. The concept has been given a theoretical basis in the Jackson Report which reviewed the Australian Overseas Aid Program. I quote:

'Australia could make a much greater contribution to educational assistance for developing countries, and at the same time develop

its education institutions into a major export sector to meet the large actual and potential demand for education in developing countries. It would have to compete with the United States and with European countries. The Committee believes that Australian education does not need the protection it now enjoys but that it has the resources and ability to compete effectively in an international context.'

In comparison with the United States and major European nations, Australia accepts a relatively low number of foreign students. In fact, our proportion of overseas students declined during the 1970s although I believe there has been some recovery early this decade. I believe this indicates that there is a tremendous potential market for our educational services. The Jackson Report believes that our market source and the major demand for our educational services will come from Asia during the next decade. According to that report:

'The demand for education services throughout the Asian region is likely to be quite large in the next 20 or so years. The expansion of Australian education to meet this demand would encourage cultural exchanges and tourism. It would provide jobs for Australians directly, and there would be multiplier effects through the provision of food, shelter, clothing and entertainment for students.'

We on the opposition benches recognise this potential and I can assure members that we will be having discussions with both the university and the institute in order to develop this proposal further and, at a later time, to present the proposal to this Parliament.

When we talk of tertiary education we should not forget our own students and I speak of those not only from Hobart or Launceston but those from the north-west coast and those from isolated rural communities. I commend the Government on its initiative and its political intelligence in introducing the \$30-a-week subsidy to students travelling to tertiary institutions. I believe it will be increased some time this year - hopefully as soon as possible - to \$40 a week but I would ask the Government to consider getting that subsidy - which is very important and vital to the parents and the students of the far north-west coast - out of the football arena.

I ask the Government to consider an independent inquiry so that an actual amount can be determined which would consist basically of a living component - the difference between keeping a student at home and keeping a student away - and a component to cover transport costs. It may be that the Government would consider the reintroduction of some form of scholarship for those students who must study away from home because I think it is important that we equalise the opportunity of all students in the State. If one has children living on the north-west coast, as a parent he is at a disadvantage compared with those who have children living in Hobart. I think that disadvantage is recognised and I believe the Government should take some action in addition to what it has already done to try to eliminate that disadvantage altogether.

It is the basic provision of education in this State which is of importance to me and to members on this side of the House. Very simply, the quality of our education is dependent upon the quality of the services we provide. It is the human factor above all else. It is the quality of our teachers in schools and colleges. We have that quality, there is no doubt about that. There is the occasional teacher who may not be suitable, who may not be a dedicated hard-working professional - that is often the case in almost every walk of life - and that occasional teacher may have to be counselled into another occupation in order to maintain quality teaching service in our schools. Let me repeat, however, that such teachers are very rare within our service.

Quality leadership and teaching in our schools and colleges must diminish over time if there is no adequate provision of professional staff. Nowhere is this more evident than in our primary schools which have experienced significant cutbacks in staffing.

This has meant a severe reduction in the quality of the education services we can provide for our young children and has been most pronounced in the specialist areas - music, physical education, art and library services. Some primary schools have been forced to increase class sizes beyond the Committee on Primary Education Report's recommendation of 25 in order simply to maintain specialist services and even then a choice often has to be made between, say, music and physical education - and even library services.

I am talking about the right of every young child to a basic, balanced curriculum delivered by professional teachers who are qualified and highly competent in these specialist areas. That is quality and we must ensure such a balanced curriculum is offered to all students wherever they may live. That is equity. For a long time children in rural and isolated schools have not experienced the quality and equity available to their counterparts in urban areas. I believe this Government must, as a matter of priority, adopt strategies to ensure that specialist teaching is available to these children. This will obviously mean the adoption of a more favourable staffing policy in rural and isolated schools.

It is also arguable that the quality of leadership in our primary schools is being adversely affected by the increased pressures on principals. Many lack support office staff - personal staff - and with staff cutbacks they are often forced back, often on a full-time basis, into the teaching role, as is the situation, for example, at Natone Primary School on the north-west coast.

A quality primary education is vital to any young child if he or she is to be given the right start in life. A balanced curriculum is essential to that education but above all priority must be given to the development of basic competencies in literacy and numeracy. This has been recognised in the recent Report of the Australian Education Council Task Force on Education and Technology - in fact it refers to high levels of literacy and numeracy by the end of primary school. But even these competencies cannot be considered in isolation and without reference to the changing nature of society. Despite all my searchings through the files and the records of the utterances in another place of the Minister for Education I found very few references to education. I found one quote in the 'Examiner' of 29 June 1985, in which the minister also recognised that one cannot look at literacy and numeracy in isolation. He said:

'If society examined excellence in literacy and numeracy as a value in isolation, it would be ignoring the challenges posed by social change.'

He went on to say:

'The definition of the nature of literacy and numeracy in a computer-based society is a major question for resolution.'

I wonder how many of the members in this Chamber are in fact literate in terms of computer language. This calls into question the provision of basic technological hardware in our primary schools so that our young children can develop computer literacy and an awareness of the role of technology in the communications revolution and in the gathering, analysing and synthesising of information. I believe children in our schools must have access to computer facilities, must have hands-on experience. This Government ought to give consideration to a program whereby such facilities are phased in to our primary schools, otherwise it will be a case of information-rich and information-poor, which can only further exacerbate the poverty cycle.

Unfortunately under this Government we are witnessing a cutback in the very basic provisions. I know primary school principals are fearing a further reduction in their annual requisitions as a result of this year's Budget. Only this morning I was talking to one who pointed this matter out to me very clearly and in very strong terms. This means one thing and one thing only: the costs of the provision of a basic education will increasingly be forced on the parent or parents. Already that cost, as reflected in annual levies and other ongoing charges - and members who are parents will know what they are, if they send their children to State schools - is a burden on many low-income or

pensioner families. That is why I sought a response from the minister on the urgent need to increase funds available for loan issue. Unfortunately - and I do not blame him - I do not think he understood exactly what 'loan issue' meant.

Whilst the objectives of primary education have been clarified in recent years, the role of secondary education is still in a state of flux. I look forward to a definitive statement from the minister - I was terribly disappointed I did not hear it last night - on the future direction of secondary education, the topic of a statewide centenary conference late last year. I know our secondary schools are seeking direction from the leadership in the system and I do not believe that at this time they are getting the leadership they need.

In recent years there has been a spate of major reports from within the State attempting to find a solution to the vexing problem of the role of secondary education. Of these, I consider the Scott Report, now almost ten years old, to be an excellent document which I heartily recommend to the minister. This report, in conjunction with another report released last year - the Quality of Education Review Committee Report - can and should provide a sound basis from which the aims and objectives of secondary education, clearly stated, can emerge.

We need to define outcomes in terms of competencies and the QERC Report identifies such general competencies required by all individuals. These include the ability to acquire information, to convey information and to apply logical processes and I suggest that means the flexibility, creativity and ability to make sound judgments in the context of uncertainty. It also includes the undertaking of tasks as an individual and as a member of a group. These are the other two of the five basic competencies the QERC Report presented by Professor Karmel has suggested.

We also need to heed the advice contained in the Australian Education Council's report on education and technology which says:

'... there is considerable support for the view that the provision of narrow vocational training is not appropriate in the context of rapid structural change where skills can become quickly outdated.'

In other words, our schools and colleges must have as a priority the development of the intellectual capacity of their clientele. They need to have a high level of basic skills and competencies to enable retraining as a consequence of structural changes in the economy. It is vitally important that we intensify our professional development of teachers so that, across the curriculum, our teachers have a knowledge and understanding of computer technology and communications.

Of course the confidence and skill in using technology is needed by all citizens if they are to participate in shaping the ways technology is used in the community and the world at work and I notice that the Task Force on Education and Technology recommends that State ministers for education urgently develop policies and practices to achieve that confidence and skill.

One of the most critical concerns within the education system is the future of our secondary colleges - or perhaps they should be more correctly referred to as community colleges because that seems to be the way they are evolving - and the relationship between these colleges and technical colleges, in terms of accommodating the educational needs of students whether they be young or of mature age. We have the ridiculous situation of two colleges side by side at Burnie on the north-west coast: the Burnie Technical College and the Hellyer College. There is no sharing of staff or resources and it seems to me that this is a situation which is a waste of taxpayers' money. It is a situation which the minister ought to look at very closely because he will have that problem magnified when we look at the future of Alanvale College later this year.

I await with considerable interest the Government's response to the Education Department report on the future of secondary colleges and senior secondary education in Tasmania, and the submissions from appropriate interest groups.

As far as retention rates from Grade 10 to Grade 11 are concerned, there is no doubt they are improving and figures look more healthy now than they have done in the past, particularly if we include students who are moving or have moved into the technical colleges. But the retention rate can and must be improved because, the way I see it, participation is so interrelated to equity. However with increased numbers participating in programs offered by our secondary colleges we are facing accommodation and staffing problems. The management of these problems will be one of the prime concerns of the new minister, the member for Bass. I was disappointed that the very highly successful 'plus one' campaign was not continued by the Government last year. Perhaps it is concerned that, if it has too many people in the colleges, it will have real problems and a blow out of the Education Department's budget in terms of staffing in particular.

I believe one of the major barriers to retention has been the existence of the School Certificate at the end of Grade 10. So many students get that certificate and say, 'That is it! This is where compulsory education ends for me. This is where my education ends'. I hope the Government will endorse the recommendation of the Schools Board for a single exit certificate which will outline in very full detail a student's achievements and provide clear guidelines and clear information, so that employers will be able to decipher this document far more readily than they can apparently decipher the current certificate.

I also commend the Government on its move to introduce Higher School Certificate courses in the district high schools in isolated areas. I also hope it will look at funding the application of distance technology to enable those courses to move away from their basic quality, the very basic courses running there, so that students can move into courses which are offered to their counterparts in the urban areas.

I think it is reasonable to suggest that our colleges in particular need to be freed from the financial and administrative shackles which bind them and hinder their ability to be more responsive to the needs of the communities they serve. This will require more flexible staffing arrangements and greater financial autonomy for our colleges and I hope that is recognised in the report on the future of secondary colleges and in the Government's response to that report.

Even our schools need to be more responsive to their communities, particularly in relation to parental and employer expectations. Any movement towards school councils ought to be both welcomed and encouraged by this Government. Educational aims and objectives cannot be determined by any school in isolation from the community it serves.

Excellence should be the hallmark of our education system. Each student must have the opportunity to develop excellence in whatever area he or she chooses and we must ensure that we have the highest quality of educational provision, the highest quality of educational leadership and the highest quality of teaching so that once again excellence can become the hallmark of our education system, a system which must remain the envy of other States.

I thank members for their indulgence and I support the motion.

Opposition members - Hear, hear.