



Colin Rattray MLC

Legislative Council

Date: 16 July 1992

Electorate: Apsley

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## UNEMPLOYMENT

**Mr FLETCHER (Russell - Deputy Leader for the Government) - Mr President, I move -**

**That the Council do now adjourn for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the totally unsatisfactory level of unemployment as identified by the recent release of Department of Social Security statistics.**

**Mr RATTRAY (South Esk) - Mr Deputy President and members, first of all I note with interest that the President is out of the Chamber. In this first address to you this morning, I would like to say thank you to the past President for his kind help and assistance from the time of my election in the north until my trip down to Hobart. I know his contribution to the Legislative Council was one that was greatly appreciated by many people.**

**I would also extend a welcome and hopefully a very good working time to the new member for Buckingham - welcome along, David, and I look forward to working with you. I have made the acquaintance of the honourable member for Hobart in the past week and I certainly appreciate the relationship and look forward to working with her as part of the team.**

**I would also like to thank the staff for their help and courtesy at all times, both in the north and down here in the south. I have certainly appreciated the welcome I have received and also the acceptance, I believe, of all the members of the Legislative Council of my becoming a member. This is certainly quite different from going along to normal council meetings and meeting with other people and I appreciate the support of most members in my starting here as a member and as a representative of the people of South Esk.**

**I note with interest, Sir, that you have returned. I would like to congratulate you on your election the other day to the office of President . I offer my sincere congratulations and I certainly look forward to working with you in the time that you are President.**

**I thought this morning that the urgency motion placed before us by the honourable member for Russell was an opportunity for me, as a new member, to make some input in relation to the unemployment scene throughout the nation and in Tasmania, and particularly in my own rural district. I note the figures referred to**

by the honourable member for Russell showing the difficult times facing people in isolated rural areas, and my area is no different.

It concerns me greatly to see that many young people throughout the country have virtually no future because of the way society is today. It is something that is close to my heart because in my area young people live a considerable distance away from some of the education facilities and those young people are not able to take up the opportunity for that extra education because of isolation or because, not having enough money in the time they are growing up, their families are not able to support them. It is a very trying time. We see lots of young people who are wandering around like a dog with no home; they do not have any place to feel secure. Unless one sees them and is close to them I do not feel that many people in the system today quite understand the nature of those youth and the way they are expected to grow up.

The effects of unemployment on families are at times traumatic. If a husband who has been used to working and is in that age bracket of the thirties to forties is suddenly cast into the system as an unemployed person it has many side effects on the standard and the lifestyle of those people. It brings problems to their children; the uncertainty of what they are able to do or what road they are able to go down in the future. It is something that is of tremendous concern to those people.

The implication for society and communities is something that I do not think we can measure in dollar terms. To my way of thinking, a lot of people over a long time have been hiding from the reality of life - and that is the need to make hard decisions. I have seen families in my community where, to this stage, the father and the mother have never been employed, and the future of their children, I believe, is no better - probably worse. So I see many problems in this area.

The education of people has been given credence over the past few years, but, as I said before, in many cases it is difficult for young people to take up the offer, because they are not able to afford it and also because it takes them through to that age bracket, out of their teenage years, where they are not able to be employed - because people do not seem to want to employ them when they are nineteen or twenty or so on. It is very difficult for those young people then to make their way into the work force; it is a very difficult time for them.

We talk about the 11.8 per cent rate of the jobless in Tasmania and across the nation, but in many areas it rises to far more than that, in pockets. I refer to the statistics that the honourable member mentioned earlier. Sometimes when one looks at a particular community it would probably stagger and frighten him to see the number of people who are unemployed.

We have had schemes as far back as the RED scheme - and I refer back to local government schemes in the 1970s. Those schemes were put into place and, from many of those schemes, there has not been any long-term benefit in terms of the money that has been spent. Governments are working on it now. I believe the pressure is so strong, with all the talk that has been going on in the past few months about the unemployment situation throughout the nation, that governments are becoming more sympathetic towards this. But I feel there needs to be a better understanding in putting in these schemes.

Plenty of schemes that can be put into place can bring a long-term benefit, and I refer, Sir, to the scheme that was put in in the Fingal valley quite a few years ago by one of the previous Labor governments. It was put in there on the demise of the coal industry. At the time, there were people in our community saying, 'Why put in a scheme to plant trees where you are taking some out to put some more in?' At this stage the Fingal valley is getting a return from the vision of those people who put in that scheme; people are now harvesting the trees throughout that area. It is putting money into that area; it is providing work in that area. But if the foresight of those people at that time had not been correct, it probably would have been another drastic 'down' area - more so than it is today.

So I believe there are suitable schemes. I know in our area alone there is room for tree-planting schemes which, in the long term, would benefit not only the people who work there in the immediate future but into the future there would be a supply of raw material that would take us into the next century. To my way of thinking, we can throw only so much money out the door before we wonder where it is going. I believe if we were to look at that sort of scheme in the isolated rural areas throughout the State we would not only pick up some of those areas but we would also be able to ensure a positive return well into the future. If I spend \$5 000, Sir, I like to have some idea of whether I am going to get any of it back - and hopefully just a bit more.

The other thing that concerns me greatly at this stage is something that was mentioned in this Chamber the other night about the possibility that the Department of Construction may be wound down. Looking around at all the work that is needed on many of the road systems throughout the State, there must be room for young people to be given jobs and put out - it might be at the end of a fern hook to clean up an overgrown corner but to my mind, there is nothing that does one more good than getting out into the real world and doing a bit of work. I believe they would certainly be better people for the experience and the activity. One of the most important things, for my part, is to see a young person rise at about half past six on Monday morning and say, 'I'm going to work this morning. I have a job and I have to be there at half past seven, and I hope not only to work and get some money but I hope that I will be able to learn something'. Working is a learning experience and I believe many of these hands-on jobs are a wonderful way for people to learn and to fit in with the community - which we all desire. I am tremendously disturbed at the way the nation is going in regard to unemployment, and I have been for a long time. I think that we must have a positive view and I believe that if we can get a lot of our people back to work it is far better to pay them for work than it is to pay them to do nothing. In the long term I think that all of us would agree that we must have a positive outlook. If we go on into the next century in the same way we are going now it will be a very difficult time for many people.

Usually in the past, if we have had a scheme promoted by someone or some government, by the time the scheme is in operation it is probably six months down the track; it can be longer. I believe that the Government needs to act this time, not talk about it. If it talks about it from now until Christmas time a lot of those people who want to get to work and want to get some money for Christmas will be lucky to have it by Easter. I think that in his submissions to the Government

**the honourable member for Russell needs to put forward the fact that these schemes need to be implemented. They do not need to be talked about; we want to get them out on the road. We want to get these young people back at work and also we must take into consideration those in that other age bracket who have been lost to the work force and who are finding it very difficult. The first thing an employer will tell a person in an interview is, 'If you're 30 or over you've probably had your best working days'. I do not agree with that. I believe that people in that age bracket are able to offer a lot of productivity to an employer.**

**So I see that it is very important to get action on this question. The governments need to look to it and I know the Leader for the Government will pass on my concerns about where we are going and what we are doing.**

**I represent a rural-based area. In the past we have been represented by very good people who have brought these things forward - Mr Archer and before him Mr Carins. They did a very good job looking after our area. I hope to be able to make sure that the Leader for the Government in this House is aware of what we need and if he conveys my concerns to the Premier and his Cabinet and the Government I will be very appreciative.**

**Sir, I hope in the future to be able to contribute to the discussions here in the Chamber. I was very interested yesterday in the discussions concerning the bills; the way they were discussed yesterday and thrashed out is something that I am delighted to be a part of. They were not just run over as other pieces of legislation; there was a lot of intelligent, well put-together discussions on those items.**

**I thank you, Sir, and members for listening to me this morning and I will look forward to future debate in this Chamber.**