



EMBARGO: 7.00 p.m.

PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

The pace and nature of change in modern life can cause special kinds of community problems - and special responsibility for Governments. Nowhere is this change more direct in its effect than it is with young men and women.

Trends to smaller families, longer formal education, more females working outside the home and evolving lifestyles all have direct impact on the ability of the young to adapt and handle these new pressures. Technological change of course has immediate and often dramatic effect. Many business firms are replacing juniors with computers, or with automated assembly line machinery, so the problem of finding jobs adds to social pressure.

Today, the problems which adolescents have of identifying their goals and working towards them become increasingly difficult, and at the end of the road the jobs are harder to find.

There is concern about the impact of Aboriginal welfare programmes on the problems of Aboriginal students who have been encouraged to stay at school and now find like other young people that the expected rewards are harder to attain.

In the universities there is concern about student extremists whose support for radical political causes and manipulation of student elections has led to charges of intimidation and violence. Most students at university are conscientiously working towards the goal of higher education, yet extremists given them a bad name. Some young people seek their recreation in the open air, on trail bikes or find group identification in motor bike clubs. The overwhelming majority organise themselves well with a very real concern for other people in the community. Yet sometimes they may find themselves all denounced from bench or pulpit because of the actions of a very small group that might beat up streets on high-powered super bikes.

So the situation that the young Australians are placed in today cannot be ignored by governments. The Federal Government is aware of its responsibility to the young.

An Office of Youth Affairs has been established in the Department of Environment, Housing and Community Development. It has direct access to the Minister on all matters of youth policy. A full time Director of the Office will soon be appointed and I expect the Office to reach its full staff capability within a few months. Meanwhile, it is actively working on a number of projects following discussions with Commonwealth, State and local government bodies and voluntary organisations concerned with youth affairs in all states.

The Office has given immediate priority to the study of a number of key questions. It will encourage the provision of integrated services at a local community level by local government and non-government agencies. It will study the funding of national secretariats of community sponsored youth agencies. It will develop a "conference" approach to government consultation with youth. It will examine the adequacy of statistics required for the planning of youth services and will look at the special problems in the change from school to a work environment.

In other words, it will act as a bridge between the Federal Government and all these organisations - both government and community-involved in any way with youth activities. It will provide the government with a ready and continuous means of communication with young people and all those who work with them. The Office itself will be staffed with young people and others with specialist experience.

In many ways it is easy for government and politicians to talk about these kinds of social problems. It is easy to refer to solutions to 'deep seated' structural and long term problems. But maybe this is small comfort to young people trying to cope with the pressure and problems of life in the modern community. All of us - politicians, bureaucrats, teachers, judges and law enforcers - can show greater understanding and tolerance. We can act with more compassion having regard to the way in which life's pressures do bear particularly heavily on young men and women. Governments can play a part. The Office of Youth Affairs is an attempt to at least make a coordinated start to seeing how problems can be solved.

But governments can only do so much. It is up to the community - and particularly community leaders - to play a responsible role. Our country's future depends on the way we tackle the task.