



PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

Australians understand that unemployment - a problem which concerns governments throughout the world - is complex and not given to simple or instant solutions.

The Government has made it plain that we regard unemployment as one of the greatest social problems in Australia. Unemployment can and does cause disillusionment, frustration, family anxieties and hardship. It's a cruel waste of community resources - a waste Australia cannot afford.

Our concern about unemployment is more than words in Parliamentary debate. It's more than images. Long before the current debate, the Government looked ahead and set a number of significant actions in train.

In October 1976 we set up the Williams Inquiry into the relationship between education and training and re-training programmes. This wide-ranging inquiry - the first of its kind for more than a decade - followed our concern to make sure that our education system met the special needs of individuals and the requirements of the labour market.

The results should be available shortly. It's a report that should provide the basis for the States and the community to be involved in its implementation.

More than a year ago, the Government initiated an inquiry under the chairmanship of Sir John Crawford, to suggest ways in which Australian industry might best adapt to structural change.

When that important report becomes available, it will merit the closest study by governments, employers, unions and other groups in the community.

Just two years ago, the Government set up a separate Department of Productivity. We wanted to assist Australian industry improve productivity and adapt to technological change.

Time and events have shown we acted with foresight.

That Department, under the active leadership of Ian Macphee, is carrying out valuable work. It has been successful in

developing joint programmes involving management, unions and State governments in finding ways to increase productivity - particularly through new technology - in highly protected industries.

Such close consultations are now underway in the footwear, clothing, textiles, forging, tyre, tanning and whitegoods industries.

In 1976, the Government also commissioned a detailed examination of the Commonwealth Employment Service. That inquiry reported late last year. We acted on the report to upgrade the C.E.S. to make it a modern, efficient employment and counselling service.

The recent decision to establish a top-level Cabinet committee under Tony Street's chairmanship to review thoroughly the basis of industrial relations in Australia and their relationship to employment is also closely related to this whole issue.

Is the Government meanwhile doing enough to alleviate the hardship of unemployment while our other objectives fall into place?

The Government offers help to those who do not have jobs - and is providing particular assistance to young unemployed. The N.E.A.T. Scheme, the Special Youth Employment Training Programme, and other programmes, are designed to do just this. The programmes are adapted, changed and improved as we gain further experience with them.

More than 60,000 young people have already been helped by the Special Youth Employment Training Programme since its introduction in October 1976. There are another 40,000 people now in training under the Scheme.

A further 45,000 young Australians have been helped under the Community Youth Support Programme. Also, the Experimental Programme for Unemployed Young People provides special remedial education to those young people who have never had a fair go in their lives.

These are on-going programmes - on-going commitments - that will not be stifled by any lack of Government funds.

I have made it clear that in the months ahead the Government will be virorously seeking to involve the community in the challenge of unemployment. The Government cannot work alone. We cannot act in isolation in tackling the problem. We need community involvement, community co-operation. Government, unions, management, social welfare groups, education authorities - all have a part to play.

That is one reason Mr Hamer's initiative in calling a working conference to discuss the whole question of change and unemployment deserves strong support.

The Minister for Productivity, and officers of that Department, will attend the conference. The Department - which has been

working with the States on these issues - has particular knowledge and expertise and will certainly make a constructive contribution. It's work has been on a region by region, industry by industry, company by company basis.

Ian Macphee's Department will also be closely involved in the Steering committee in establishing the programme and guidelines for the conference.

The Government earnestly hopes that other States will follow Mr Hamer's lead.

There is no question that working groups discussions at a State level, with Federal Government support, can help us get to the heart of the unemployment problem.

Governments, unions, management and the community can learn from each other - at first hand - and build a constructive climate for debate and policy-making.

This kind of working conference is away from the Canberra environment where temptation for political grandstanding often seems irresistible to some participants. People come to Canberra and leave the problem on the steps of Parliament House, and then they depart. But this kind of conference can add greatly to a national resolve to overcome the problem.

The Government's commitment to overcoming unemployment is absolute. Our concern for the unemployed remains a high priority. We will continue to demonstrate that concern by our complete determination to keep on with the fight against inflation. There is no doubt whatsoever, this unrelenting course is in the best long-term interests of Australia.

For this is the only way which will restore basic economic health and growth to our nation - a growth so necessary to providing more jobs for Australians.

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