



Speech by

HARRY BLACK

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

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TRAINING FOR MATURE-AGE WORKERS

Mr BLACK (Whitsunday—ONP) (6.35 p.m.): I must point out One Nation's policy in relation to employment. We seek to and have always sought to introduce a very workable and viable traineeship and apprenticeship program, because we recognise that the present system is not working to its potential. We must come up with the best alternative to gain useful and complete training and apprenticeships that will develop into full-time employment for our unemployed. This policy encompasses all our unemployed—our school leavers, our youth, our mature-aged people, and our skilled and unskilled unemployed.

The 1996 census found that the qualification levels of many of our Queensland workers in many industries were lower than those possessed by workers in the same industries in other parts of Australia. An improvement in Queensland's qualification profile would result in greater competitiveness in a wide range of industries. The cost of implementing these recommendations should not just be borne by industry but by the Government as well.

However, the Government should not just be supporting business and industry for the hell of it; the Government should be supporting business and industry to reduce the unemployment level. As a small businessman, I believe that traineeships and apprenticeships should be offered to reduce the current devastating levels of unemployment, because unemployment levels of 9% are just not acceptable.

Avenues are available to those workers who are currently employed and who wish to enhance their skills or upgrade their skill level in that area in which they are currently employed by attending a TAFE college and paying the fees personally, or having their employer sponsor their upgrading of skills. DETIR provides grant funds to TAFE colleges and, in rural Queensland, a network of four agricultural colleges provides training for a skilled rural work force to meet local and State industry needs.

DETIR's annual report states that, during 1997, it was revealed that long-term existing workers were being signed up as trainees under the ATS. That was done so that the employer could gain some pennies from heaven—in this case from the Government—from the subsidy provided by the Commonwealth Government as employing a trainee, and registered training organisations could gain training funds from the Queensland Government. Some examples of this practice are a medical practitioner—a tyrannosaurus rex of the economic feeding tree—in Queensland who registered himself as an information technology trainee with the sole purpose of receiving training at taxpayers' expense for the information technology component of the course that he had undertaken; the university that signed up its entire staff as information technology trainees; and one registered training provider who instructed his staff via an internal memo to blitz the local businesses in an attempt to sign up existing employees as trainees. Staff were also instructed to inform employers that, "Essentially, your company is getting thousands of dollars of training free." I am yet to receive any information that any of those people or organisations have been prosecuted. That needs to be rectified.

In closing, I must say that One Nation does not wish to deny existing workers access to training, rather One Nation acknowledges that this Government already provides significant opportunities for existing employees through publicly supported training such as TAFE institutes and, in cases of hardship, subsidised training. One Nation can see merit in the coalition's motion, but as is One Nation's policy, we are able to vote as our conscience directs. We cannot overlook our primary goal to provide jobs for our unemployed. We should resolutely seek ways of reducing unemployment. That is why I will be supporting the Government's amendment to the motion tonight, as will some of my colleagues.