



Speech by

**DESLEY BOYLE**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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**MATURE AGED UNEMPLOYED**

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (11.14 p.m.): I want to raise with honourable members of this House a very serious issue, that is, the plight of men in their middle years who are unemployed and who have few prospects, or so it has seemed to them in recent years, of gaining employment. For many of these men in their middle years, having lost a job, they feel as though they have lost a limb. They lose confidence; they can become seriously despairing and feel as though they have been tossed onto the scrap heap. The effects on them can be serious and beyond simply being a matter of losing an income on which they had relied.

Several such men have been to see me in Cairns in recent months. George, for example, is a man who is now 55 years of age. He has been unemployed for the past five years. In his youth he knocked around Australia. He started off as a shearer and did all kinds of unskilled and semiskilled jobs. He found his own way and was an independent man. He married and raised a couple of kids along the way. He was proud of his strength, his fitness and his capability. But as he came into middle age and sustained a back injury and so was not able to compete with men whose bodies were younger and fitter, George was progressively let go from work, found less and less work, and has, as I said, been unemployed for these past five years.

When there is a prospect of a job and he attends an interview, there is a kind of simmering anger in George because he fears that yet again he will be rejected, that he will be found insufficiently educated or not good enough for the jobs of the year 2000. That is indeed what has happened to him. What a waste of productivity for our society and what a sad story for George and his family.

Robert came to see me as well. He is a bit younger at 49 years of age. He was retrenched from a white-collar job some two years ago. Since then he has been unable to find work, other than some casual work in Cairns filling in doing accountancy duties at night with hospitality ventures. Robert has no prospect of a continuing permanent job. His marriage is in strife. He feels that the tension has caused some real difficulty in his marriage and he has no prospects.

However, I am pleased to say that, thanks to the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, we have an innovative program that has commenced in Cairns particularly targeting mature aged unemployed, the majority of whom are men. Some of the figures that bear on this category of people who are unemployed illustrate how serious the situation is. Sixty-three per cent of Australian workers who have given up actively seeking a job are over the age of 45 years. Forty per cent of men aged 45 to 55 years are underemployed. Two-thirds of 45 to 55 year olds have low literacy levels. Forty per cent of the unemployed over the age of 45 live outside State capitals. Long-term unemployment is highest among the 45 to 54 year old age group.

These men have been the forgotten men, and that is not right or fitting for any of us in this House, including those members representing city electorates. These men have already made fine contributions. However, it is important that when many of them are only around halfway through their lives, we as a society find a proper means by which they can continue to contribute and contribute better than they did in their youth—perhaps not in the same way in terms of physical fitness, but with the wisdom and the experience that can only come with age.

The new program, thanks to the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, involves a contribution from this State Government of \$60,000 for this project, which will assist some

older unemployed people towards building on their preparation for the jobs of the year 2000; help them with literacy and numeracy skills, job searching skills and computer skills; and work to confront employers with the facts that older workers are more reliable, efficient, responsible and loyal, and that they relate well to customers and make excellent role models for younger employees. The prejudice that has existed in the minds of employers must also be tackled.

I congratulate Turning Point, the firm in Cairns which will administer this program, for its initiative in this regard. I wish it well. I am told that it has already had successes with some individuals. It is to be hoped that this program will give others the courage to have yet another go.

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