



Speech by

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Hansard 9 October 2003

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL

Mr BELL (Surfers Paradise—Ind) (2.34 p.m.): At the outset may I say that I do favour the bill before the House and I will not be seeking to oppose it and I would wish to acknowledge the value of the principles which are prompting the government in presenting this bill. No-one can really argue against trying to have a smarter and skilled work force or giving a longer and better and more challenging education to our young people.

At the risk of being somewhat discordant, I would like to build on an aspect raised by the Leader of the Opposition when he spoke. I have heard many speakers on this bill one after the other saying how beneficial it will be to upgrade the skills of our young people, and there is an assumption made by many speakers that this initiative will work. I am mindful of the old adage that you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink. I am somewhat concerned that perhaps with all the best will in the world these measures may not be as successful as many in this House would hope.

Reference has already been made to a group of some 10,000 young people who are neither in education nor training nor employment right now. I have to say from my own experience that there is a significant group of young people in this category. Since I got my blue card I have been doing a little bit of work with a number of these young people, both male and female. I must say that I have been absolutely astonished at the number of young people in the 14-, 15- and 16-year-old age group who have packed up and left home, severed all contact with their parents—even though their parents might have been very distressed by that—who have no interest in education or training, who have no motivation and who have very low self-esteem. I have been amazed to see so many of these people not even in receipt of unemployment benefits, who are living with other young people in squats and making a hand-to-mouth existence as best they can.

I can recall very recently—in the past 12 months—working with two young lasses. One was 14 and one was 15. The 14-year-old was living with her older boyfriend until he was taken to prison. She then went back to school—somewhat reluctantly—but was certainly not prepared to return to her home. She is now bumping along in the education system but is hardly likely to succeed at school. The other young lass found that at 15 she could not get unemployment benefits but she could get Austudy. So she got Austudy, enrolled at school and attends about every third day.

I managed to persuade another young chap who was living in the sand dunes, eating out of rubbish bins and sleeping with tramps to take a job as a trolley boy. He took the job only because I found it for him and then volunteered to drive him to work each day. But at least he achieved some work ethic out of that. At least he achieved some social intercourse with other young people and at least he got used to getting up before noon each day.

Another young lad, who is sadly back in prison, had not the slightest interest in obtaining employment at all, not the slightest interest in continuing his education. His major interest in life was sniffing paint. I tried very hard on that one but was quite unsuccessful.

These are just four examples of the myriad situations in our community and, sadly, they are not rare situations of young people of very tender age who have simply totally severed contact with parents and other relatives, who see themselves as being reliant on themselves and their friends of their own ilk, who are unmotivated, virtually unemployable and are uneducatable. I worry how these provisions are going to affect these young people. I know it is easy for me to stand here and point out these problems. It is much harder to find solutions. I certainly give the government credit for trying with the bill before the House.

But I suggest to the ministers responsible that perhaps more thought needs to be given to those young people who resist. It is assumed that young people will take advantage, it is assumed that young people will be influenced by their parents, but I suggest that a very sizeable group will require not just counselling but also one-on-one encouragement and daily contact. These are young people who will not even go anywhere near the Department of Families. So if this is to work, it is really essential that that be looked at and we do not find that young people are remaining in our schools simply because they have to be there and that the schools become a childminding centre for older children who legally cannot leave. We really need to have something that is innovative.

I really had to make those comments, because it concerns me greatly that there is this pool of young people—and I believe from my own observation and from what has been said to me that the pool is increasing. Nonetheless, this is a valiant attempt. I do not think we should assume that it will just simply work because it is there, but I compliment the government and, in general terms, I support the initiative.