

APPRENTICESHIPS, NUMBER

433. Mr MURRAY to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection:

- (1) Is the minister aware of the assertion made by the Prime Minister during the election debate broadcast on Sunday evening that the number of apprenticeships has doubled during the term of his Government?
- (2) Can the minister advise the House of the situation regarding apprenticeship numbers in Western Australia during that period?

Mr KOBELKE replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question. He has expressed a real interest in trade training.

- (1)-(2) I was astounded by the Prime Minister's statement on Sunday night that the number of apprenticeships has doubled. That does not reflect my knowledge of what has happened in other parts of Australia, and it is certainly not true in Western Australia. Only last Thursday night I held a meeting with a number of leading businesspeople to encourage them to take on more apprentices. During that meeting, I pointed out that over the past two years the number of apprenticeship commencements in Western Australia had fallen alarmingly. The number of automotive apprenticeships fell by 14 per cent during that two-year period; electrical apprenticeships fell by 13 per cent; metals manufacturing apprenticeships fell by 27 per cent; furniture trades apprenticeships fell by 19 per cent -

Mr Board: You are not talking about traineeships.

Mr KOBELKE: Mining apprenticeships fell by 34 per cent; and primary industry apprenticeships fell by 18 per cent. The figures for completed apprenticeships vary over time. In 1993, 3 498 apprentices completed their courses, and last year 3 074 apprentices completed their courses.

Mr Board: Why not mention traineeships?

Mr KOBELKE: Those figures represent a reduction of 13 per cent in the number of apprenticeships in Western Australia.

Mr Board: What about traineeships?

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Murdoch to order for the first time.

Mr KOBELKE: The Prime Minister is being deceptive. He is using traineeships to bolster the numbers. Traineeships are an important new growth area. However, they have a very poor completion rate. Someone who has completed a six-month course, cannot then be expected to do the electrical work on a house or to repair a car. We need more people to do the traditional four-year apprenticeships. That does not downgrade the importance of traineeships, but they represent a very different level of training. The Commonwealth Government started calling courses "new apprenticeships", when in reality they were traineeships. We now find that the Prime Minister has dropped the word "new". If someone starts a six-month course but does not complete it, the Prime Minister is calling that an apprenticeship. That person would not be qualified to work as a tradesperson. Such a person would not be qualified in a range of vital areas in which we need people to undertake and complete the traditional four-year apprenticeships. Our community, our businesses and our economy need that level of training.

Because the Commonwealth Government stopped using those figures, I can refer back only to 1996-97. The number of apprenticeships across Australia in 1996 was 126 300, and in 1997 it dropped to 123 800. The Commonwealth stopped collecting the relevant data in 1998 because it did not want evidence of a further decline. We have a desperate Prime Minister who has presided over a dramatic fall in the number of apprenticeships in this country. Despite that, he has had the gall to try to mislead the Australian public by saying that the number of apprenticeships has doubled. It certainly has not. The Prime Minister should apologise to the Australian people for clearly misleading them on Sunday night.