

NO. 1 TV RECORDING:

"TALK TO THE NATION"
BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES
20TH NOVEMBER, 1961.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Before this election campaign is finished you will listen, if you have the patience, to many arguments on many matters; some arguments on great issues and some arguments, no doubt, on side issues.

But I thought I would like to take a fairly early opportunity of putting this to you. There is one great issue in this election and that is the issue of what kind of government you want. You have had a Government headed by myself now for a long time - you may think rather too long. But that doesn't matter. What has happened in our time of government will, I think, have a profound influence on what you think on Polling Day. Because if the truth is - and I think it is - that we have enjoyed in Australia 12 years of remarkable growth and remarkable prosperity, with a remarkably high level of employment, notwithstanding small occasions, if these things have happened and the nation is stronger, and the people themselves are better off, happier, freer, then I would doubt very much whether you would want to change the government and hand it over - to whom? Hand it over to a collection of people - and about those people I want to say this with great respect - a collection of people who haven't been able to live together, politically, haven't been able to govern themselves, politically? And now they are asking you to put us out, and to let them govern this country for you. That seems to me to be the very great issue in this election.

Now having said that I just want to mention to you - because I can't mention everything - a few matters by which I invite you to test the position.

First of all whatever may be said about us - and I know we have our critics, I read them every day, I hear them quite frequently, and no doubt there is a lot to be said for them - but whatever may be said by our critics we have been for the whole of this time, although we have consisted of two parties, the Liberal Party and the Country Party, we have been completely united. We have never had any discord in my government; we have had nothing but loyalty, one to the other; and we have had nothing but loyalty from those who sit behind us in Parliament. Now that is a tremendously important thing. You can't really run the business of the country well if the Board of Directors is engaging in wrangling and disputing.

We don't wrangle, and dispute. We argue, we agree, we act.

And in these last 12 years, while it would be silly for any government to pretend we did everything, the truth is that a good government a loyally composed government, a government that co-operates, one member with another, a government that has ideas and has ambition for the future of Australia, can produce - and, we believe, has produced - an economic climate, a political climate, in which the country can go on getting stronger, and stronger. That is the great task of a government: not to try to run all the business in the community, but to make it possible for the community, itself, to grow and to develop. Therefore we have had stability of government.

You are being asked to change it for what I would imagine would be the most unstable government representing the most unstable Party that Australia has seen for a long time.

Then there is another thing that perhaps you might recall. The public credit of this country is very high. Now that is not just "high finance" talk. This is not intended to say something that is a little mysterious and shows how superior we are. There is something quite simple about high public credit - if you can establish it, and maintain it. Because it means that people will be willing to invest in Australia, not only Australians themselves, who are investing in this country magnificently, but people outside Australia, people who have, over these recent years been investing hundreds of millions, and an immense amount of accumulated skill in the development of industry in Australia. I know that my opponents say they don't like it. Presumably they will cut it off. It will be a sad day for Australia if they do, because without the investment of capital in this country our progress would be slowed down almost immeasurably. But there it is: high public credit established and maintained over this last decade.

There is a third thing. I believe that even our opponents regard us as having a decent sense of fair play. And fair play, the sense of fair play, translated into the industrial world, means an enormous amount because it brings about a sense of justice, and therefore continuity of work; in short, industrial peace.

Do you know that the days of work lost under my Government have never been as great as the lowest number lost under the preceding Labour Government? That's a very remarkable thing. And all the more remarkable because some of you will remember being told by our opponents, or by my opponent, "Oh, of course they will never be able to get on with the Unions, they'll never be able to get on with organised labour". But we have the greatest record of industrial peace that this country can point to. Now that is a good thing. I want it to continue, because it is only when people have the opportunity of continuity of work and production that Australia can develop more and more as it has developed over the last 10 years.

Then, Sir - you know I say "Sir" because I'm rather in the habit of that in the House, but I'll address you sir, as "Sir" - then Sir, think of what has gone on in national development. I will probably have more to say about this before the campaign finishes, but really when you look north, south, east and west in Australia at the enormous works of development that have occurred, employing thousands and scores of thousands of people, producing water for irrigation, producing power for factory development, producing ports, better ports for coal export, producing minerals, producing an increased outturn of beef for export - look I needn't dwell on all these things because I hope you will hear a lot about them before Polling Day. But when I look back over them I want to tell you that whatever you do with me on Polling Day I shall always be proud to have had some association with a process which so far from having finished, is only getting going. The last 12 years will be really small compared to what can be done in the next 12 if you have stable government, sensible government, responsible government; and government that has some imagination about the future.

Then finally, the only other thing that I have time to mention to you is perhaps this: This country is more secure than it ever has been before. That is a big thing to say. You may say to me "Well, no country is secure". That is true enough. None of us can feel entirely secure with Khrushchev and the Communists beating the big drum, setting out to frighten us, and to frighten other people by these crude demonstrations of power. Nobody can feel utterly secure about these things. It is a pretty good thing for this country of ours to have this measure of security - that its government has, in all these years, set about making close, abiding friendships, not only with Great Britain, not only with the mother country, and the other British countries, but also with the United States of America, with powerful allies in the South-East Asian Treaty Organisation, with the United States and with New Zealand in the ANZUS Treaty. These are all things that we have taken a great hand in creating.

Our stocks, our personal stocks abroad are, as I happen to know, very high. We have powerful friends. And in a world in which the threat and terror of force are to be observed day by day, the most important thing for a small country is to have powerful friends who stand by it, and by whom it stands. And of course we couldn't stand by our friends, even in a small way, if it were not for the fact that our defence preparation at this moment, is at the greatest pitch of efficiency it has ever reached in time of peace. Even our critics in Australia have ceased to criticise what has gone on in the Army, in the Navy and the Air Force, in research and development, in the long range guided missile department, in Woomera.

This has been a remarkable effort. At least I did think that the Labour Party would say, "Well we won't touch that; we'll keep that; we do want to have that measure of capacity to defend ourselves". But the only statement, so far, made by the Labour Party, and of course one never knows what will come along, has been to the effect that the defence vote is too great, and ought to be reduced.

Now I come back to where I began: there are all sorts of side issues, but the central matter in this election, from the time it began until Polling Day, is "Do you want to change your present government in favour of the kind of government that is offered to you by our opponents?"

If we had a poor record of performance I could well imagine you saying, "Well they've had their chance, they haven't done well, this is the time for experiment, let's try somebody else". But nobody really can honestly say that this country hasn't been prospering, that this country hasn't been going through a period of wonderful growth, that ordinary standards of living haven't been rising, that we haven't enjoyed the confidence and goodwill of the world. Nobody can honestly tell you that.

Therefore what you are really being invited to do by our opponents is to take a wild experiment, a sort of excitable act arising from the very prosperity of the country, "Well we're pretty well off, let's see what we can do with the people who now sit on the front Opposition bench at Canberra" - quarrelling with each other, mostly disliking each other, with hardly an ounce of mutual loyalty.

Ladies and gentlemen, quite frankly, I can't see you doing it. I profoundly hope you won't even think of doing it.