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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
MR. E.G. WHITLAM, AT A VICTORIAN
STATE ELECTION MEETING ST. KILDA
TOWN HALL, MELBOURNE, 16 MAY 1973

When I asked the people of Australia to elect a Labor Government on 2 December I said that we would need the help of all Australians - the best Australians - in carrying out our mandate.

I still need that help. A vote for Labor - a vote for Clyde Holding on Saturday - is one way of giving that help, that support. We need that support.

We have to realise that we can never take anything for granted: we have to realise that our opponents are bitterly resentful about what happened last December.

The Liberal Party today is just the party of revenge. They will miss no opportunity to take that revenge - to take it on the Labor Party, to take it on the Australian people.

It's incredible but true that this rabble, this mish-mash of vested interests, factions, bitter old men and frustrated young ones, this motley crew of incompetents still believe themselves to be our natural heaven-born rulers.

They regard the verdict of 2 December as an aberration. They like to think that the Labor Government is only an interregnum.

Because of this attitude they will use every available source of power to break the will of the Government and frustrate the will of the people, to dilute the mandate you gave us. They must not succeed. They hold power in the Senate and in the three eastern States.

The reactionary majority in the Senate will be looking to Victoria next Saturday for encouragement for their disruption and obstruction.

The Senate reflects the state of public opinion of three and six years ago but that means nothing to these arrogant, fearful men.

It does not matter to them that they are flying in the face of the clear and fresh expression of the will of the people: their Withers are unrun.

The Senate is not being asked to ratify anything that was not clearly spelled out in the Policy Speech. It was a clear precise document. We received a clear, precise mandate.

The House of Representatives this session will be putting through 120 Bills - all of them the legislative expression of the Policy Speech.

Unless our opponents in the Senate come to their senses, unless they recognise what democracy is all about they will reduce our legislative program to ruins.

Who will suffer thereby? It won't just be me, it won't just be the Labor Party. The main victims will be the people of Australia, the parliamentary system.

Not the least important aspect of our victory was to restore faith in the parliamentary system - to restore faith in the possibility of change through Parliament.

Are those hopes, the hopes particularly of the new generation, to be shattered on the rock of the wilfulness and bitterness of a handful of Senators? We won't have a bar of it. The business of Government can go on.

A great number of things can be done outside Parliament. Indeed we showed that, in the early days of our Government. But we were scrupulous to do nothing by extra - parliamentary means for which we did not have a clear and commanding instruction from the people.

But when a Government is forced, deeply against its own will and inclination, to carry on the people's business by by-passing Parliament, it's unhealthy for the Government, for the Parliament and for the nation.

We are not going to be forced into that position.

This country is still paying a heavy price for the opportunism of Sir Robert Menzies in throwing the two Houses of Parliament out of kilter in 1962.

As a result, since I became Deputy Leader just 13 years ago I have had to fight 8 national campaigns. But I don't suppose we can blame Sir Robert Menzies for taking his chance when he saw it in 1963.

Nothing would give me greater pleasure personally and politically to end this situation where the Government of Australia is to be conducted in an atmosphere of perpetual electioneering.

I hope on Saturday the people of Australia will recall recalcitrant, reactionary Senators to their duty and call them to their senses.

I hope they will say on Saturday that they were deadly serious about what they did last December and that they will insist that the program of which we were elected is pushed through.

And it is not only the Senators: every vested interest who feels in some way endangered or disadvantaged by our drive towards a decent Australia is sweating on these elections.

I won't say anything here about the strutting, stunting Premier of Queensland - Mr. 19%. (I am referring to his electoral support, not any other condition, not his dividends.) All I can say is I wish he would give Queensland and Australia a chance.

These are the people who rant and posture about our electoral reforms. Yet the Country Party Premier of Queensland has the nerve to claim a popular mandate with 19% of the vote in that State.

The parties that tolerate that sort of electoral monstrosity have the gall to preach to the Australian people about electoral gerrymanders.

The only electoral gerrymanders that survive in this country were engineered by Labor's opponents.

They kept Labor out of office in South Australia for years - despite the will of the people. They still keep Labor out of office in Queensland.

They won't be allowed to deny Labor voters a fair and equal chance in the national elections.

Our electoral reforms will ensure that no one group of the population has an electoral advantage over any other. We don't believe that country votes should be worth more than city votes - or vice versa.

We are not going to allow privilege and social discrimination to be permanently enshrined on our electoral laws.

Our electoral bill goes to the root of our parliamentary democracy. Our electoral bill will bring nearer the only fair and just basis for a voting system - the principle of one vote, one value.

Who can trust the Liberals and their friends when it comes to electoral reforms? They talked for years about votes for 18 year olds. Mr. Gorton promised votes for 18 year olds at the last elections.

The Liberals broke that promise. They were frightened of the young people's vote.

Labor has legislated to give 18 year olds the vote. It was left to my Government to carry through the reform promised by our predecessors.

Our opponents are frightened of what Labor can do with the people's support.

We have this extraordinary spectacle of the A.M.A. so-called "fighting fund" - a million and a half dollars to fight against our health program.

A million and a half dollars - five or six times the amount spent by any of the parties in the last campaign. And for what?

To propagandise against a program which was at the very heart of our policy in three national elections.

If any one issue was responsible for the tremendous gains we made in 1969 - the election which laid the foundations for victory in 1972 - it was our health program.

Nor all the misrepresentation of the A.M.A., not all their millions, not all their false and misleading propaganda is going to prevent us implementing our pledge to the people and is going to prevent the Australian people from having a decent, efficient, just health scheme.

These are principally Federal issues - but politics in Australia is indivisible, certainly as far as the Australian Labor Party is concerned.

This is the third great meeting I have addressed in this campaign in Victoria.

I know Mr. Snedden is much too busy to campaign in his home State.

But I have been glad to support Clyde Holding. I have been glad to indicate by my presence - and by my wife's presence here tonight - the indivisibility of the Labor Party and the Labor program.

This is the first State election in this State since the Victorian branch of our party was reconstructed and reformed in 1970.

Great progress has been made by our party in Victoria - and Clyde Holding has been in the forefront of that progress.

Victoria needs a young, contemporary and progressive leader. Clyde Holding is such a leader.

Clyde Holding's actions in 1970 were as significant as those of anyone in making Victoria the most successful branch of the Labor Party in this country.

You have seen what our reforms achieved last December. The biggest improvement in Labor's vote in any State occurred in Victoria. The same progress can be achieved in the elections next Saturday.

I ask your support for Clyde Holding and the Labor Party on Saturday, not just because they offer a better way for Victoria but because I want a demonstration here in Victoria that the irresponsibility and selfishness of our opponents in Canberra will not go unheeded or unpunished.

A strong Labor showing on Saturday will give them the warning they need.

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