

Address to the Nation

by the Prime Minister on 22 January 1975

I'm taking the earliest opportunity to report to you on the mission abroad which I have just completed in company with some principal members of the Australian administration. This was very much a representative mission because of the complexity and diversity of the task we undertook on Australia's behalf. So as well as my colleague, Mr Lionel Bowen, the Special Minister of State, I had with me the heads of the Overseas Trade Department, the Minerals and Energy Department and the Attorney-General's Department and senior men of the Prime Minister's Department, The Department of Foreign Affairs and the Treasury. The composition of the team itself indicates something of the scope of our task.

The really remarkable thing about Australia's relations with Europe for the past fifteen years has been the relative lack—almost total absence—of contact at the highest level. We visited seven of the nine members of the European Economic Community. The Common Market as a whole is our second largest trading partner—after Japan. It buys—or refuses to buy—agricultural products as a unit; it acts as one on our beef or our sugar. Yet we have never before had head of government contact with the Community. More than one and a half million Australians have come to us from the countries we have visited in Europe. Those countries have been ignored by Australian Prime Ministers for fifteen years. One of the countries—Yugoslavia—is a founder and leader of the non-aligned world—a significant grouping with which every country around the Indian Ocean, except South Africa, is associated. The Soviet Union is one of the two super powers which principally hold the fate of all of us in their

hands. No Australian Prime Minister had visited Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union or most of the other countries visited by my mission; no Australian Prime Minister had visited the rest since the fifties.

Only a visit by the head of government enables us to put our case, our views—to cover the whole range of policy—as fully and forcefully as possible. Only a visit by the head of government compels the countries visited to clarify and co-ordinate their own policies towards us. There has been a decade and a half of mutual neglect at this level. It was certainly time that we ended that neglect—stopped taking each other for granted—and this was very much the time to do it.

The countries of Europe are among our chief trading partners, most of them are in every sense comparable countries. We share trade, culture, standards and attitudes, technology—and we share the same economic problems. It is because we are a great trading nation, because, like Europe, we are highly industrialised and highly urbanised that we cannot insulate ourselves from Europe's economic problems. There is scarcely another country whose economy depends more on the trade which passes through its ports. Most Australians live in cities which are trading ports. We cannot isolate ourselves from the world and its problems and particularly not from Europe and its problems. Economic isolationism is not an option for Australia. The impact of world problems is making its presence in Australia. Australia must have her presence felt in the world.

The overall result of my mission has been that we have been able to present Australia's view

thoroughly, comprehensively and authoritatively on issues that matter in nations that matter. I don't believe that any sensible Australian who cares about our standing in the world, our reputation, our interests, our influence, our welfare, would question that this work is a crucial part of the task of any Australian Prime Minister.

Australia's economic strength—and this is just the time when we should be concentrating on our strengths—lies in our resources. It is a matter of history that a great deal of these resources fell under overseas control in the 1960's. There is one resource that is still predominantly in Australian hands—uranium. I found immense interest amongst the industrial nations of Europe in the purchase of Australian uranium, and therefore, deep interest in the policy of the Australian Government. I made it clear that we are anxious to ensure that we are able to develop our resources with the maximum Australian ownership. A number of European countries are keen to co-operate with us in the uranium enrichment process as, of course, is Japan. Australia's top officials have now been with me to each of these countries. Our policies ensure that very soon Australia will be earning more from her energy resources than she ever got from wool.

Everywhere I stressed Australia's support for international co-operation in reducing world tensions and for the exercise of restraint by the great powers. I urged the widening and strengthening of the great movement for detente. I urged fuller and wider support for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which a number of countries have yet to ratify. I urged this course particularly in countries seeking to buy our uranium. I stressed our belief—strongly shared by the three Indian Ocean nations I visited—that the Indian Ocean must not become a scene of competition or confrontation between the great powers.

I do want Australians to understand the remarkable transformation in Australia's standing and place and prestige in the past two years. We are in the extraordinarily enviable situation of having warm, meaningful, mature relations with all the powers and groupings of relevance to us. This has been achieved without damaging old friendships. It has been achieved not by

being all things to all men, but precisely because we put our views clearly and firmly and stood by them. This visit was necessary to complete the pattern—it was a crucial part of the pattern of relationships we have built over the last two years. Of course my reception abroad was personally gratifying, but one just cannot fail to be heartened by the warmth, the reality of the interest and respect towards Australia. It was, for instance, made very manifest again and again when I resumed my visit after coming home at the time of the Darwin disaster.

And, of course, the interest in Australia isn't lessened by the fact that these countries, those of them who share similar systems and economies, are experiencing exactly the same difficulties we are now passing through. Just before I visited the EEC, the heads of government of the nine member countries had met to discuss together their economic problems—unemployment and inflation—the very same problems I discussed with seven of them separately. With all the Western leaders I shared this common concern. And always the underlying theme was the recognition that the greatest danger is loss of nerve on the part of leaders or peoples. I am confident that the Australian qualities universally admired abroad will guarantee that there will be no breakdown here. During the past five weeks the Parliament was in recess; the Government certainly was not. It has been active and alert and will continue to be. The whole economic measures I announced in November are now in operation, though the effect won't show in the figures this month or next month. We've got under active consideration the whole range of options open to us, but it needs cool, steady judgment. We will be applying it in the weeks and months to come, strengthened in the knowledge, confirmed by my visit, that in no sense is Australia alone—not alone in the difficulties of the time and above all, not alone in the world—a world where we enjoy immense goodwill.