



PRIME MINISTER

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ADDRESS AT KOOYONG ELECTORATE COMMITTEE BANQUET

It is very good to be here tonight and a particular pleasure to speak at a dinner organised by Andrew Peacock's Electorate Committee. Andrew is a very effective and hard working Foreign Minister. He was so heavily engaged in the drawn out final stages of the negotiations at the Conference on International Economic Co-operation that at one point he got only one hour's sleep.

But then he has had a very hard act to follow - Mr. E. G. Whitlam. Mr. Whitlam as you will remember said of himself "I have been the greatest Foreign Minister that we have had for a generation." Mr. Whitlam was in some respects the Mohammed Ali of Australian politics. He knocked out the ALP. He left the Australian economy reeling, and he gave the Australian political system a battering. He recently retained his leadership of the ALP on points - two points. When someone asked him whether he was a spent force, he answered modestly "I am one of the driving forces of the party as I have been for some years and I suppose I shall continue". Mr. Whitlam is certainly trying to make a comeback - at the Perth ALP Conference, he made an astonishing speech promising that he would henceforth be economically responsible. Mr. Hayden said that the speech must have been written on the road to Damascus. It got wide press coverage, but when an important ALP delegate was asked what he thought of Mr. Whitlam's new found responsibility he shrugged and said "I don't bother to listen to him any more". But perhaps Mr. Whitlam will lead the ALP a little longer.

One of the chief contenders, Mr. Hawke, goes around making such statements as "My heart says no, but my head says yes," and refuses to throw his two hats into the leadership ring unless he is guaranteed victory. What a vote of confidence in Mr. Whitlam that is.

The Government is currently considering one of the most important and far reaching problems which any Government has had to face. Whether to permit the mining and export of uranium, and, if so, on what terms. This is not a simple yes or no issue. There are a number of inter-related issues, all of which require the most careful consideration. One thing is clear - a large number of countries have reached the conclusion that to satisfy their

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energy requirements over the next two decades, they must increasingly rely on the use and development of nuclear energy. Already many European countries are heavily dependent on nuclear energy. They have indicated that their reliance on nuclear energy will increase substantially within the next few years.

Australia holds 20% of the world's uncommitted reserves of uranium. We must seriously consider whether we have the right to withhold such significant supplies from a resource-hungry world. The benefits of uranium mining would of course be considerable, particularly in relation to the economy of the Northern Territory. But, before making any decision on mining, the Government must be absolutely satisfied that the interests of the aboriginal people are fully protected. We must be assured that the environment will be protected.

The Government has already decided that if new export contracts for uranium are permitted, they will be subject to the most stringent set of safeguards announced by any country. There will also be a continuing effort to find ways of strengthening these safeguards, and we have indicated that we will participate in the international nuclear fuel cycle evaluation programme. We are satisfied that this policy represents a practical, reasonable and effective package of measures.

The Government appreciates the significance and complexity of the uranium issue, and is giving detailed consideration to all the argument on both sides of this debate.

At Perth, the ALP decided in 45 minutes to place an indefinite moratorium on the production and export of uranium, and to repudiate any uranium contracts entered into by a non-Labor Government. This was not a moral decision, not even a victory for hearts over heads. Morality does not change overnight - the stand taken by the ALP in Government was diametrically opposed to the one it has now adopted.

When the ALP was in government, its thinking on uranium was dominated by commercial considerations. Labor's uranium statements were punctuated not by moral dictates, but with dollar and cent signs. In October 1974 the Minister for Minerals and Energy said the ALP would "ensure that our major trading partners, Japan, Italy and West Germany, obtain an equitable share of the uranium we have for export." In October 1975, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs stated that "International assurances have been provided by Ministers that Australia will meet the uranium requirements of our major trading partners which could amount to about 100,000 tons of uranium". In March 1975, the then Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Cairns, and the Minister for Agriculture, Senator Wriedt, issued a joint statement with Iran that "Iran would be given access to supplies of uranium from Australia under favourable conditions". On 2 June 1975, the present Shadow Minister for

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Minerals and Energy, Mr. Keating, said "Japan is interested in moving into nuclear power and enriched fuel. We are prepared to give the Japanese any amount of fuel that they need..." "The only thing is that we would like to do the enriching. Instead of sending just yellowcake at bargain-basement prices, we want to get the profit that comes from enrichment." At Terrigal in February 1975, ALP delegates stood and cheered as the then Minister for Minerals and Energy urged the go ahead for uranium mining.

At that conference, the ALP decided to develop Australia's uranium resources and build a uranium enrichment plant. The conference totally rejected a motion to halt uranium development for twelve months while a full scale government inquiry into nuclear technology was conducted. At that time Mr. Dunstan, the Premier of South Australia, one of the men who now advocates an indefinite moratorium, was promoting the establishment of a uranium enrichment plant in South Australia. Mr. Dunstan admits that he has changed his mind "quite markedly" on the issue of uranium. Whatever else may be said about Mr. Dunstan, no one would question that he has mastered the craft of understatement.

On October 28, 1975, Mr. Whitlam signed a Memorandum of Understanding with representatives of Peko Mines and Electrolytic Zinc for the development, mining and sale of uranium from the Ranger area in the Northern Territory. Mr. Whitlam said, that "The Government believes that the Ranger project will be a major export earner - and it will be working.. to bring this .. mining project to fruition."

In Government, the ALP's stand on uranium was based completely on commercial considerations. In Opposition, it was the product of cynical political manoeuvre. Those who think the ALP's position was based on moral considerations should ask themselves "what morality is there in a decision that ignores the world's energy needs?"

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What morality is there in a decision that ignores the fact that it would accelerate the move to the plutonium economy?

What morality was there in taking a decision that reversed established A.L.P. policy in 45 minutes, and on which none of the A.L.P.'s leaders spoke their mind? Mr Hawke, Mr Whitlam and Mr Hayden, all sat silent during the debate. Some people may be uncharitable enough to regard this as the great achievement of the A.L.P. conference. Perhaps the fact that Mr Hawke's heart said no, while his head said yes, left him temporarily paralysed. Mr Hawke found his voice after the debate was over, after the resolution was passed.

The mining and exporting of uranium does raise moral issues of fundamental importance - Labor has always evaded them.

My Government's steadfast position has been that decisions on uranium will not be based on the commercial considerations, that were so transparently at the heart of Labor's approach. Our consideration of the issues has begun, and we have given first priority to considering the impact of mining on the welfare of Aborigines - and on the natural environment, which is, in some cases, both beautiful and exceptionally fragile. These are basic issues, and there are many others including the adequacy of international safeguards to prevent nuclear weapons proliferation; the problem of the disposal of nuclear wastes, and the fact that Australian uranium can defer the move to the plutonium economy - a deferral which would provide greater time for an international solution to be found to the hazards of plutonium and high level wastes; our obligation under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and particularly Article IV of the Treaty; the urgency of the world's needs for uranium, to provide energy and the ethical question of whether we are entitled to withhold them; the world tension which would be created if we refused to supply uranium.

Our decision will form a proper and considered response to these and to other complex moral and technical issues which uranium involves.

Uranium was always the first issue European heads of Government raised with me during my recent visit to Europe. This was understandable since the Europeans - like the Japanese - are almost totally dependent on imported energy resources to generate the electricity necessary to keep their industries going and their homes operating. I emphasised during my visit to Europe the need to have major high level discussions on our trade relationships. We desire to broaden the relationship between Australia and the E.E.C. and Mr Peacock has already undertaken some moves to achieve this result. There is a need for Australia and Europe to recognise the common interest between us. It is these considerations which provide the broad background against which our trading relationship should be re-examined.

For some years, Europe has excluded Australian agricultural products from her markets, and disrupted our traditional markets in third countries by subsidising exports of her food surpluses. Recently, these policies of exclusion have been applied not only to agriculture but to Japanese manufactured goods and steel from Japan and South Africa. The attempt was also made to make Australia reduce our exports of steel to the E.E.C. by 25 percent on the grounds that Australia was an unfair trader. I would not voluntarily contemplate such cuts and the request has since been withdrawn.

The E.E.C. with its 260 million people is the world's largest trading bloc, accounting for 40 percent of the world's trade. If the problems in our trading relationship are to be adequately resolved, Australia has to be represented at a high level on a continuing basis. As you will have read, Mr John Howard has been appointed Minister for Special Trade Negotiations with the E.E.C. The appointment of a Minister for Special Trade Negotiations, rather than a senior official, will indicate to the Europeans the seriousness with which we regard the negotiations.

As the Constitution requires that a Minister should head a Department, Mr Howard will head the new Department of the Special Trade Negotiator, comprised of between 20 and 30 people seconded from other Government Departments. Mr Howard will be involved in high level negotiations with the nine member states of the E.E.C. and the Commission in Brussels, on the totality of Australia's trading relations with Europe - agricultural items, industrial products and the supply of raw materials. He will keep under close consideration the question of developing and formalising a structural framework between Australia and the E.E.C. in order to further the development of trade between the two sides. And as a result of Mr Howard's appointment there will be closer consultation with the E.E.C. on matters of great common interest. He will work closely in conjunction with the Ministers for Overseas Trade and Foreign Affairs, have immediate access to myself and have the full support of the Government.

Finally, I would like to say something on racism. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference, I strongly opposed the policies of apartheid and white supremacy in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. The Liberal Party's opposition to these policies is not new - in 1961 the Right Honourable Member for Kooyong said in the House of Representatives:

"I am against apartheid, because it offends the conscience, against it as a basic policy, because it seems to be to be doomed to a terrible disaster".

"The day will come when, conscious of their own human dignity, their capacity and their strength, (the blacks) will no longer tolerate the status of second class citizens."

"And when that day comes they will demand their due, not in an atmosphere of evolving friendship, but with hostility, and for all we know, violence."

The ultimate conflict, as I said in London, may be bloody and devastating. The doctrine that one race is superior to another is repugnant to the basic beliefs of liberalism - an affront to human decency. Such doctrines provide the conditions which communism can exploit, and every day that Mr Smith delays majority rule strengthens communism and increases the likelihood of disaster in Southern Africa. If this is to be avoided, it is important that the opposition of countries like Australia be well known.

And one of the important ways of bringing this point home is through our policy on sporting contacts with South Africa. On this matter I would like to say that there is no question of Australia introducing politics into sport. It is the Government that tells a black that he cannot play cricket with the whites just because of the colour of his skin which has introduced politics into sport.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have as your local member an energetic and dedicated Foreign Minister. Andrew's efforts are serving Australia's national interests well, and I am sure that despite the fact that his duty takes him out of Australia frequently, he is serving his electorate as well as he is serving the country.

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