



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

19 January 1986

TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER

ETHNIC MEETING - LALOR LIBRARY, SCULLIN BY-ELECTION

Friends,

It gives me very great pleasure to be here today. And that is not something that I just say in a formal sense to you.

As I was able to say in the Federal Parliament in 1984 when the Opposition had sought to make something of a political issue out of immigration and did themselves a very great disservice in the process. I was able to say that in fact one of the basic reasons why I joined the Australian Labor Party straight after the end of the last war, when I was a student at the University of Western Australia, was the great pride that I took in the way in which the Labor Party in government at that time, developed the most imaginative immigration policy which has ever been adopted by any political party in any western democracy.

The Labor Government in power then - firstly under the Prime Ministership of John Curtin till 1945 and then Ben Chifley after 1945, with the Immigration Minister being Arthur Calwell - made a decision even during a period of war when massively important issues had to be confronted in war-time, they thought about what sort of country Australia was going to be after the war.

And one of the central features of their thinking as they tried to plan for a better Australia after the war was a commitment to a massive immigration.

As a young man in Perth, as I went to university in 1947, I joined the Labor Party then - now nearly 40 years ago, 40 years next year - one of the main inspirations that I had was the way in which I was able to identify with the Labor Party in their view about what needed to be done to change the composition of Australia.

At that stage, at the end of the war, Australia had a very small population of 7 million people. And the leaders of the Labor Party realised that this was a large country with very great resources. And they knew that if we were going to be able to develop those resources we had to have more people - more people

than could just be provided by the process of natural increase. And so there was born the great immigration policy of that post-war period.

And under that policy, which saw the greatest migration wave in recorded history, we had a total transformation of the composition of the Australian population.

This was a two-way thing. It obviously has been a great thing for Australia that people could come here and bring their skills, traditions, experience and background to this country. And also it has been good for them because we have been able to offer a new home and new opportunities for people in circumstances better than they probably would otherwise have been able to enjoy from the countries from which they came - at least in those earlier days just after the war.

And so this has been a good thing for the people that have come and certainly a great thing for Australia.

As I look at this country today - in 1986 - and I try and compare it with that country of 40 years ago when I joined the Labor Party, it is almost impossible to see the country as the same place.

Because now it is not 7 million people. It is getting on for 16 million people.

And an economy which has been radically transformed. A country which is now not inward-looking but is realises that we are part of South East Asia - the most rapidly growing part of the world. A country which is now able to make a very significant contribution to developments in those areas and in turn to benefit from them.

And right through all those changes has been the change in composition of our population.

As I say, it is easy for me to come and meet with a group like this because for the whole of my adult political career I have identified with, and regarded as fundamentally important, this change that has taken place in Australia via our immigration program.

Peter referred to the fact that before I went into the Parliament I was the President of the ACTU for the decade of the 1970s. And in that decade one of the most important tasks of that job as President of the ACTU, I regarded as my work on the immigration advisory and immigration planning councils - jobs which I undertook for the whole of that decade of the 1970s.

Because it is true and should be remembered, that when the Labor Party at the end of the war, decided that it was going to embark on this massive immigration program, a great deal of persuasion had to be done with the trade union movement.

In the period before the war we had never had full employment in this country and there was some suspicion on the part of workers

in this country that if we had hundreds of thousands of people coming here from overseas, then they were suspicious that there wasn't going to be a continuation of their employment.

Fortunately for this country, the leaders of the industrial labour movement, as well as the political labour movement in that period at the end of the war, they had a vision of the future as well.

And my predecessor Albert Monk, President of the ACTU, Percy Cleary another leader in the industrial movement and who was also briefly in the Federal Parliament, those leaders of the industrial labour movement also had a vision of the future. And they supported and gave the support of the trade union movement to the Government as they developed this immigration program.

And I was able to continue that commitment of the trade unions in my period as President to ensure that not only would we continue to bring people to this country but that we provide the services within this country which were necessary to ensure that the people who came here were given the best possible opportunity of integrating into their new homeland.

And so it was that when I finished with the ACTU and went into the Federal Parliament it was perfectly natural - given the history that I have referred to - that I should continue to give importance and significance to matters concerning our immigration policy and the welfare of people in this country who have come from overseas.

Indeed I ensured that the immigration portfolio was elevated into the Cabinet so that the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs would be at the centre of discussions in our policy formulation in Canberra.

So you can see that this great labour movement, which I have the honour to lead federally, is the movement in Australia both politically and industrially which has been right at the centre of the formulation of policy and then the implementation of it to change the character of Australia.

Not the Liberals, not the conservative forces of this country, but the great labour movement, politically and industrially, which enabled the implementation of this vast immigration policy. And we have remained steadfastly committed to that policy.

There have been times when pressures have been imposed by various elements within this community to try and make us waver from our commitment to that policy. But it is one of the matters of great pride for me that never, from the time that we made that undertaking during the last the last war, has the labour movement wavered from that commitment to both the policy of bringing people to this country and also to ensure that once people are here that as much of our resources as possible can be devoted to ensuring that their transition into our society is facilitated.

And since I have been Prime Minister I have ensured that the two Ministers that we have had - first Mr West and now Mr Hurford -

have had whenever they needed it, immediate access to me with any problems.

And we have, on a national basis, very significantly increased the amount of resources made available to the programs directed towards facilitating the entry and assimilation of migrants in this country.

And within this electorate of Scullin I would like to indicate to you the difference in the amounts of money allocated. In the year before we came to office only 33,000 dollars - that was in the year '82-'83 - was available for the funding of migrant resource centres in this electorate. And now in this year - '85-'86 - that has been increased by 350 per cent to a total of 148,000. And that in itself is a reflection of the sorts of priorities that we attach to these things.

Now as Peter said, the policies of government which are of importance to the ethnic community are not simply the policies that deal with immigration per se, or deal with the provision of resources for migrants once they have arrived here, but a whole range of policies in the area of employment, education and health that are important to you.

At a function which was held just a short time ago when we launched the campaign for Harry, he said there that the Liberals had the temerity to try and say that they are the ones who had the concern for families.

Now of course as he said that is arrant nonsense. And indeed it is.

It is all very well for the Liberals to get up and say they are concerned about families as though in politics you only have to say I am concerned about families and that means something.

What families are concerned about are the specific things that determine whether families are better or worse off. It is no good a politician getting up and saying we are concerned about families and then sitting down and saying aren't I a good boy.

The things that determine the well-being of Australian families are the policies about things like housing, education, health and employment. Those are the things which determine what the conditions of Australian families are going to be.

And just remember the comparison between our opponents in government and what they did and did not do in those areas. And what we have done since we have been in.

Just look at the issues briefly.

Housing. Are there going to be homes for the families of Australia. When we came to office at the beginning of 1983, the level of the building of homes was just over 100,000 - 105,000. The housing industry was operating at significantly below its capacity. We have lifted that up to 150,000 - a 50 per cent increase. We have had that sort of increase in the allocation of

funds for public housing. So on the question of homes for families - we have turned the housing industry around and provided many, many more homes for families in Australia.

In education. For the first time now we have a significant increase in the amount of funding in real terms available to the education system, for primary, for secondary and the tertiary levels. It had been allowed to whither under the Liberals. Money available to the education system had gone down. We have turned that around.

In regard to health. When we came to office there were millions of Australians, particularly low income families, for whom spectre of illness was totally frightening because they had no proper cover. Under the scheme that we have introduced, no family in Australia has to be worried about the spectre of illness as they were before.

In regard to jobs. Whether there are going to be jobs for the kids of Australian families. A quarter of a million jobs disappeared in the last 12 months under the Liberals. We have created half a million new jobs. Creating jobs at a faster rate than they have ever before been created in the history of this country.

So those are the things that are important for families. Not for a politician to get up and say we are interested in families and at the same time as saying they are interested in families allowing the building of homes to run down; to allow jobs to disappear; to make health a horror area for the families of Australia. All those things they did while they talk about having concern for families.

We just don't get up and say we are concerned for families - which we are. We, at the Federal and State level, pursue the policies which ensure that Australian families, and may I say particularly families that have come from countries overseas, are going to have the opportunity of living a better life.

So I join with Peter in saying how pleased I am to be here. But I also particularly join with him in asking you that you will try and make sure that between now and the 8th of February that you will talk with your friends; with your neighbours; with the people you meet in your churches; your clubs; your sporting associations; wherever you have your contacts with your fellow Australians; please tell them how important it is to get out there on the 8th of February and vote.

Because we want to receive from you in this by-election the sort of endorsement which we believe those policies which I have referred to deserve.

And finally let me say that the electors of this area have been very well served by Dr Harry Jenkins in this electorate. The measure of respect in which he is held is that he was elected to the very high office of the Speaker.

Now the time has come when both he and the Government have

decided that his services can be used in another capacity.

And his son, Harry Jenkins Jnr, who is going to be standard bearer for Labor. Just as his father has done an excellent job representing the interests of the people of this area, I know that Harry Jenkins will do that.

Please ensure that he gets the support that he deserves and that the Labor Government deserves.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce Harry to you now.