



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LAUNCH OF SOCIAL JUSTICE REPORT
SPRINGVALE - 2 MAY 1988**

The launch today of this report, "Towards a Fairer Australia: Social Justice Under Labor" marks an important new stage in the life of the Labor Government.

It is the first time that all the facts about what I believe is a proud Labor record of social justice have been gathered together in one document.

It is a pleasure to launch it here at the Springvale Community Centre because it is at Centres such as this that the effectiveness of social justice programs is ultimately tested.

And I believe too that Centres such as this - both in their very existence and in the quality of the services they are capable of delivering - reflect the depth of the Labor Government's commitment to enhancing and expanding such programs.

This report is about Labor's social justice strategy and I want at the outset to stress that it has been just that - a carefully crafted and costed strategy, pursued from our first days in office, to lift the level and quality of social justice in Australia.

This has not meant randomly applying band-aids to social problems only when those problems have become too big to ignore.

Social justice under Labor does not mean throwing money around in the false hope that indiscriminate expenditure might be an adequate substitute for careful targeting.

Our strategy has not been about abandoning the weakest members of our community on the scrapheap while extending protection to those who do not need it.

Each of those failings has characterised the mismanagement of social policy by our conservative predecessors - and each still forms part of their philosophy of government which they would implement if they were ever returned to office.

006172

What social justice under Labor means can be simply put: a concerted effort to make Australia a fairer society

- a society in which economic resources are taxed fairly and distributed fairly;
- a society in which there is fair access to all essential community services;
- a society in which there is equality of rights in civil, legal and industrial affairs;
- a society in which all Australians, regardless of their background, can participate in making the decisions that affect their lives.

It has to be understood that these aspirations have been and remain fully dependent on and supportive of our economic strategy.

Our economic strategy is about generating new prosperity in the community; our social justice strategy is about distributing that prosperity fairly throughout the community.

Our economic strategy has meant tightening our belts as we pass through what have been for Australia very tough economic times. Our social justice strategy has meant that the necessary sacrifices have been shared, fairly, by all sections of the community.

Right from the start of our term in office, when I articulated the foundations of our economic strategy - in for example my address to the National Economic Summit I convened straight after we were elected - I also articulated our social justice goals.

In that address, I declared that the purpose of the economic strategy was "maintenance and through time an improvement of ... standards of living".

The Prices and Incomes Accord between the Federal Government and the trade union movement also spelt out an economic strategy to achieve social justice goals.

Its success can be measured by the fact that under the Accord over one million jobs have been created in the Australian economy.

That's one million Australians in work, providing for themselves, participating in a more fulfilling life - one million people who would otherwise have been unemployed, unable to cope without assistance, excluded from the satisfaction of employment.

Our creation of one million new jobs means Australia has created jobs at a rate twice that of the rest of the Western industrialised world - and four times that of our conservative predecessors.

It has simply been a massive step forward in the enhancement of social justice in Australia.

At the same time, the real wage restraint that helped create those one million new jobs has been compensated for by the Government in a variety of ways.

- we have restored Medicare,
- we have massively expanded child care places,
- we have extended care for the elderly in their own homes,
- we have improved education and training opportunities for young people,
- we have increased social welfare payments to those in greatest need - such as the low-income and pensioner families who are now receiving the new Family Allowance Supplement,
- we have increased the age pension in real terms.

Our social justice strategy has been implemented following careful reviews of Government programs, including the Cass Social Security Review, the Kirby Report on training opportunities for young people and the Miller Report on Aboriginal employment initiatives.

The report I am launching today provides a stocktake of all these developments and presents a comprehensive picture of the social justice initiatives we have taken.

But it also recognises that there is more we can do - and more we must do.

Just as we recognise that building a more productive and competitive Australia will take time, so it is true that we can't build, overnight, a fairer and more just Australia.

Too many Australians are still finding it hard to make ends meet.

Too many children are enduring the deprivation of poverty.

Too many people are unemployed for too long.

Not enough young Australians are completing school.

There is still more to be done to address the legitimate needs of the Aboriginal people.

To meet such problems, the report Towards a Fairer Australia spells out the Government's future policy directions for the further enhancement of social justice in Australia.

Let me summarise them now.

006174

The maintenance and improvement of living standards depends on what happens to three things: wages, taxes and prices.

We are confident that our policies will deliver in each of these areas.

Our argument at the next National Wage Case, our introduction of significant personal tax cuts in the life of this Parliament and our further reduction of inflation will lead first to the maintenance, and then the improvement, of real disposable incomes over the next year or two.

We will continue to create jobs, so that the best means of avoiding poverty and hardship - namely, employment - can be available to as many Australians as possible.

We will encourage and assist people who have been unemployed for long periods of time to break the cycle of unemployment, poverty and low self-esteem which is hampering their efforts to return to work.

We will lift the proportion of young people who complete Year 12 schooling to 65 per cent by 1992.

We will be making a special effort, starting in this our Bicentennial year, to recognise more fully the needs of the Aboriginal people.

And we will provide the necessary level of Government assistance so that by 1990 no Australian child need live in poverty.

The major reason why thousands of Australian kids have not been properly fed or clothed or sheltered or educated or sustained in good health - and all these are the bitter fruits of poverty - is not lack of care by their parents but simply lack of money and lack of access to services.

That is why we have pledged ourselves to provide low income parents with tax-free cash payments large enough to lift their children out of poverty.

The first instalment - \$22 a week for each child under 13 and \$28 a week for those 13 to 15 - has already been delivered.

By 1990 we will lift the payments to the further benchmarks we have already set.

That is why we have introduced the new Child Support scheme which will provide further help by extending secure, regular maintenance for children whose parents have separated.

And that is why we will continue to supply the range of education, health and community services which families need - especially poor families with children.

It saddened me that, in response to the greatest assault ever made by any Government on the ugly blot of child poverty, our political opponents and others have only been able to trivialise our commitment.

That response shows an intellectual poverty.

But basically, it did not surprise me.

Because in none of the areas of social justice policy that I have outlined today have the Opposition got anything positive to offer.

Where Labor recognised the need for restraint and sacrifice, but ensured that the burden of restraint and sacrifice was borne by all sections of the community, our political opponents would make Australia a less fair place.

They witness a society becoming fairer and they propose to turn the clock back.

They witness a fair tax system and would make it unfair again by abolishing the capital gains tax and the fringe benefits tax.

They are considering embracing a consumption tax which would send inflation through the roof and which would increase the cost of virtually every item you buy - without any safeguards or compensations for the least well off.

Theirs is a formula for social injustice.

It is also a strategy of economic shortsightedness.

Because there are two reasons why the Australian Government must pursue social justice.

One is because it is the compassionate, decent thing to do. Australians have always tried to help their fellow citizens when they are in need.

But in the 1980s, at a time when priorities have to be weighed carefully and set firmly, and when the community's resources have to be focused as never before on vital national goals, the case for social justice becomes even more compelling.

It becomes, in fact, an essential element in national survival.

Because there can be no social progress without social justice.

Social justice should be pursued because it is in the national interest to do so.

When people are unemployed, living in poverty, or prevented by discrimination from taking their rightful place in society, that is a tragedy for the individuals concerned.

But it is a tragedy for the rest of us as well.

Because we are all the poorer as a society when any one of us is unable to contribute fully to the productive effort of the nation.

But if we are able to create jobs, reduce poverty, prevent discrimination, we will all be the richer.

That is why Labor is proud of its social justice achievements and determined to pursue its social justice aspirations - to create a more harmonious, a more just and a more prosperous Australia.
