



8

# PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
ACT ALP FUNDRAISING DINNER  
CANBERRA - 17 FEBRUARY 1989**

Ros Kelly,  
Rosemary Follett,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the few weeks of this election campaign, we are participating in an historic event in the political history of Australia.

With the elections for the first ACT Legislative Assembly, we will see the final act in the great drama of Australian democracy which began with the evolution of the colonies in the last century.

Canberra will have joined the ranks of the other States and Territories as truly self-governing entities of the Commonwealth of Australia.

It will have come of age.

And the residents of Canberra will have joined their fellow Australians in the States, the Northern Territory and Norfolk Island as citizens effectively exercising control over their own political future - people with the power and the institutions to carry on their own shoulders the responsibility of government.

Nowhere else in Australia - indeed, it would be hard to find anywhere else in the democratic world - is there a place like Canberra, large in population and sophisticated in social and economic development but denied the basic political right of self-government.

Now, with these elections, that anomaly is put right.

One could hardly say that this move is premature.

Canberra last year celebrated its 75th birthday.

All the states of Australia achieved responsible government as colonies in the last century in less than 75 years - in the cases of Victoria and South Australia, in less than one third that time.

And some of the then colonies achieved responsible government with populations considerably smaller than Canberra's current population.

So when the Federal Government decided that the Australian Capital Territory should achieve self-government, we did so with a belief that it was now time for Canberra to take its rightful place in the affairs of the nation.

The Commonwealth has given the ACT a binding commitment to maintain its budget at the same real level for three years.

Beyond that there will be another two years during which transitional arrangements will apply while the ACT moves in line with the normal financial relationship that exists between the Commonwealth and the States and local government.

At that point - in 1993 - the ACT will be standing on its own financial feet.

We are handing on to the new ACT Administration a budget in very sound shape for the future. With our three-year guarantee a responsible Administration will have no difficulty in bringing down a budget at least in balance.

From all this, two obvious - but nevertheless overwhelmingly important - implications can be drawn.

First, the decision that Canberra should take charge of its own affairs is irreversible.

We will not - we must not - pretend that Canberra can crawl back into the womb; that it can somehow turn back the clock by shirking the responsibilities of self-government.

That would make a mockery of Canberra's stature in the nation.

And turning our back on self-government in the late twentieth century would in a real sense make a mockery of Australia's two hundred year history of steady progress towards independence, self-reliance and democracy.

So whatever the nay-sayers may pretend, whatever those unrepresentative candidates opposing self-government may wish, there will be no turning back.

It is high time Canberra stood as a full member of the Commonwealth.

The second important implication of what I have said so far is this: when Canberra does assume self-government, it will need a government capable of governing.

Canberra will need an administration capable of the heavy task of leadership.

It will require a Legislative Assembly and a leadership team capable of resolving fairly the issues posed by Canberra's dual role as National Capital and as home for more than a quarter of a million Australian people.

It will need an experienced, competent, reliable Chief Minister who will be capable of administering a \$1.5 billion budget, and capable too of mixing it with the other State and Territory leaders at Premiers' Conferences and so ensuring that Canberra's claims to Federal funding are presented fully and forcefully.

I have presided over enough Premiers' Conferences to assure you with complete confidence that neither Paul Keating nor myself take kindly to States' or Territories' claims that are presented with less than complete honesty, diligence or accuracy.

So given all this, I can state categorically tonight that the only group of candidates in the forthcoming elections capable of meeting these challenges, equipped to take Canberra into the exciting opportunities of self-government, is the team of candidates under the banner of the Australian Labor Party.

The Australian Labor Party team led by Rosemary Follett, offers the best blend of experience, commonsense and awareness of community concerns.

They are committed to defending the real interests of Canberra, as it is now and as it will grow and develop in the future.

The ALP has prepared the only comprehensive platform of policies for Government.

It is more complete of course than the rag-tag collection of ideas and prejudices assembled by the short-sighted single-issue candidates and groups.

And it is more complete too than the inadequate patchwork of self-interested policies presented by our major conservative opponents.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with pride and certainty that I make this appeal for the local ALP candidates.

I do this not just on partisan grounds as a Labor leader.

I do it too on national grounds - as Prime Minister who must be concerned about the welfare of all Australians.

I do it because I have seen at the Federal level and at the State level the affairs of Government being either managed with confidence and competence by Labor Parties, or mismanaged by our divided and ineffective conservative opponents.

Let me describe the decision facing Canberra in this way.

During the last Federal election campaign in 1987, I asked the people of Australia two questions central to the future of Australia.

I asked them:

who could provide Australia with the responsible economic management it needed; and

who could provide Australia with the united and credible leadership it deserved.

Today, I repeat those questions to the people of Canberra.

Which party can provide Canberra with the responsible economic leadership it needs as it enters the mainstream of Federal-State relations?

And which party can provide Canberra with the united and credible leadership it deserves as it starts out on the challenges of self-government?

The answer can only be: the Australian Labor Party.

That was the verdict of the Australian people in 1987; it was the verdict of the Victorian people in 1988, and it was the verdict of the West Australians in 1989.

It must be the verdict in Canberra on 4 March.

Because as Canberra enters the 1990s, it is central to its future well-being that it be able to work closely and constructively with the Federal Labor Government.

And as Canberra continues to grow in complexity as a city providing an unparalleled quality of life to its residents, it is vital that its Government be guided by the commitment to social justice that is the distinguishing hallmark of the Australian Labor Party.

As a Territory directly administered by the Federal Government, Canberra has directly shared in the fruits of Federal Labor's commitment to social justice.

Let me briefly enumerate those Federal achievements.

Australia under Labor has seen the creation of more than one and a quarter million new jobs - about as many new people in work as would live in five Canberras.

That is a rate of jobs growth twice as fast as the average in the Western world.

At the same time, the unemployment rate has fallen from 10 per cent when we came to office to 7 per cent now.

Three times the number of child care places are being created under Labor than were in existence in 1983.

Well over half of all children are staying on to complete secondary school, compared to the 36 per cent who were doing so when we came to office.

Forty thousand more university places are being made available.

Unprecedented assistance is being given to families in need through the Family Allowance Supplement.

The extent of superannuation cover is being doubled to encompass 80 per cent of the Australian workforce.

Aged pensions have been increased by 7.7 per cent in real terms compared to the 2.5 per cent drop under the previous Federal Government.

Historic tax reforms have been achieved, making a system of revenue raising that is fairer and more efficient than ever before.

And on July 1, further tax cuts will be made, targeted primarily at lower and middle income earners.

In all these ways, we have great and undeniable cause to be proud of our achievements in ensuring that the national economy is sounder, and that those who are the least well-off members of our community are adequately protected.

That is a record which, in its new capacity as a self-governing territory, Canberra will have the capacity to support and enhance ... or under a conservative government to diminish and erode.

Canberra simply cannot afford to jeopardise its future by experimenting with conservative priorities - or by pretending, as the minor parties do that, the choice can somehow be shirked.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Canberra is irreversibly a part of Australia.

It cannot stand alone, outside the mainstream.

It must now start to bear its due share of the challenges of national life.

And it must also be allowed to reap the fruits, as a fully self-governing member of the Australian Commonwealth, of what will be the brighter economic future to which we are working.

\*\*\*\*\*