

"NO CONFIDENCE" MOTION

Statement in the House of Representatives by the Rt. Hon.
the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies on Wednesday, 3rd
April, 1963.

Mr. Speaker, the honourable member for Batman (Mr. Benson) is a very experienced pilot but he will forgive me when I say that during his speech I was very much struck by the fact that he was steering a course that gave the impression that he was shifting about in a five-knot ebb tide in the rip of Point Lonsdale. He will understand exactly what that means.

I think he has fallen into the common error of thinking that referring a matter to the United Nations is in itself a constructive policy. Time after time it has become necessary to say that it is not. To go to the United Nations with a policy is one thing but to fall into the habit of saying that Cuba, for example, should have gone to the United Nations or that something else should have gone to the United Nations is not a policy at all. It is a mere evasion of national responsibility and of national decision.

The honourable member permitted himself to comment adversely - he is not the only one to do so on the Opposition side - about President Kennedy's handling of the Cuba incident and about this Government's instant declaration that we agreed with what President Kennedy had done. What do honourable members opposite want us to do? We want to witness one of the really significant events in postwar history, a critical event which, if it had not been dealt with promptly and strongly by the President of the U.S., might have altered the whole balance of power in the world. When the President of the U.S. took in splendid terms a strong and definite attitude on these matters, honourable members opposite say, "Oh, it should have gone to the United Nations." I wonder whether honourable members know what they mean. Do they mean that the matter should have gone to the Security Council so that it could have been neatly vetoed by the Soviet Union? That would have occupied a certain amount of time. In the meantime, the Soviet Union would have continued to put its weapons - its missiles - into Cuba, building a base close to the U.S. which could alter the entire balance of power in the world. Is that what honourable members opposite mean? No doubt it is. Then they would say: "Now that you come to mention it, of course the Soviet Union would veto it and so it would come to nothing. But then you can go to the Assembly and have a fortnight's debate. You can have all of the Communist satellites lined up and speech after speech made. All the time the Communist position in Cuba is being built up until ultimately the balance of power in the world is upset.

Mr. Speaker, these are very serious matters and if the Opposition's attitude is that the President of the U.S. was wrong and that we were wrong to be the first people to give our approval to the U.S. action, then the people of Australia might know about this. I think they will, and I think they might think about it. They might wonder whether they should entrust not only their economic affairs but also their security and their entire future to the people on the other side of this Parliament.

Now, Sir, I speak as some sort of an expert on this matter. There are two objectives in the "no confidence" motion - I know; I have been at the giving end and at the receiving end. There are two objectives and one is to put the Government out. That is an admirable attitude for an Opposition to have and it has taken an awful long time for this Opposition to decide on that attitude. But there it is - to put the Government out. The other, of course, is, immediately or otherwise, to put the Opposition in. This would not be an unfair analysis - to put us out and to put you in.

For the purposes of simplicity I therefore propose to provide my own contribution tonight into these two aspects. I will say something about the first of them. I do not need to say as much as I otherwise would because later on in this debate my colleagues the Minister for Trade (Mr. McEwen) and the Treasurer (Mr. Harold Holt) will have admirable opportunities of dealing in detail with some of these matters. But I will not entirely let them go by.

I therefore start by saying something about putting the Government out and the reasons for it. My distinguished friend the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Calwell) has, of course, a professional gloom about the Australian economy. It is his duty to be depressed and, if possible, to depress other people. He therefore gave us a professionally gloomy account of Australia's present economic condition which was so much at variance with the facts as to be almost too ludicrous. I hope it was read overseas by people in other countries. They would, of course, burst into hilarious laughter, on looking at their own countries, to be told about this one which is in a state of economic disaster and depression.

Mr. O'Brien - That is not true.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Of course that is not true. After all, the Leader of the Opposition was careful to admit from his attack - I will call it an attack - all the material factors in the economic position. I do not recall him saying anything about the remarkable success of the Government's policy against inflation. There is laughter on both sides of the Chamber. I am familiar with all those chaps. They laugh on both sides of their faces. In one sense, members opposite laugh because they have always said inflation is silly talk and that it is a bogey and on the other side they laugh because they are not very pleased to have to admit in their hearts that the consumer price index has been stable now for years.

Mr. Ward - How does it compare with 1949?

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : I always know that I am scoring when some of you yell. But I do not worry myself about that. I am not addressing myself to the honourable member for East Sydney. Whenever I have addressed myself to East Sydney I have had to have police protection.

We have a stable consumer price index. In other words, the inflationary processes in this country which were desperately dangerous a few years ago have been brought under control. Not a word about that! Not a word about the remarkable increase in the employment in Australia; not a word about the remarkable increase in production in Australia.

It is all right. Some of the new boys will learn in due course that a few facts are much more important than some of the arguments that they present and even they cannot deny that there has been a most remarkable increase in production in this country in the last few years and a most remarkable increase in savings in this country. I go back a little while and I can remember

Mr. Pollard - Back to the eighteenth century.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : And it was a very good century. Do you know why, Sir? Because it was a century of good sense.

Mr. Allan Fraser - You are an eighteenth century Prime Minister.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : "Indeed", says the honourable member, "an eighteenth century Prime Minister." All I can say is that at the tail end of the eighteenth century they had some very good Prime Ministers and he might have been proud to be one of them. But he has forgotten his history. As I was saying, there have been increased savings. I can remember the time when my distinguished opponent, the Leader of the Opposition, used to say "Look at the way savings have fallen away. This is a sign that the Government is ineffective." Now, when he looks and sees that there are record savings, with another £2,000,000 in the savings banks he says "That is no good. This is a sign that people have no confidence in the future." You cannot satisfy some of these people. He does not say a word about the development works programme, except in one respect that I will come to in a minute. He does not say a word about the record home building in Australia, an undoubted undeniable fact. He does not say a word about the record activity in building construction - business construction - in the cities - not a word. He does not say a word about the public credit being high both here and overseas. He does not say a word about interest rates falling. He does not say a word - except a hostile word - about investment in this country from overseas. He does not say a word about the remarkable and increasing growth in the export of manufactures from Australia - nothing about these. Yet the fact is - and wherever you go you can encounter it - that there is an increasing feeling in this country, even among those who were critical, that the Government's policy has been right and that confidence in this country is building up every week and every month.

Now, Sir, having said that, because I do not want to take up too much of my time on it and there will be other people who can deal with the details of this matter

Mr. Cope - You have gone a bit flat.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : I have always noticed that when you are afraid to listen you make a noise. Now, Sir, in the course of his speech the Leader of the Opposition was kind enough to make a glancing reference or two to me. At one stage he said that I was reported to have told my Federal executive something. All I can say is that I had never heard of the report until he mentioned it last night and it was quite untrue. I am sorry that he should read things from the gossip columns. He also referred to me, and this fascinated me because I do not know whether it was a compliment or a subdued attack, as "the sole triton of post-war Liberalism".

Mr. O'Brien - That was a compliment.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : I suppose he meant to convey the impression that I was a triton among the minnows. This, I think, is overdoing it. Being a triton among the minnows is supposed to be a compliment to me and an offence to those who for so many years have been with me in the problems of this country. All I want to say to the honourable member - he has exposed his flank a little on this - is that to be a triton among the minnows is not half so bad as being a minnow among the 36 tritons who form the Labour Party and that is what, by concession, he is. He is the minnow swimming in and around among the tritons and coming up occasionally - if a fish can listen - and listening and diving down again; the minnow among the 36 tritons.

Mr. Einfeld - What do you ...

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Thank heaven you were not one of them; otherwise there would have been 35 tritons.

I want to draw attention to just one point about this devastating "no confidence" motion. There are a dozen points I could deal with, but I have time to deal with only one. In a remarkable exercise of reasoning, the Leader of the Opposition conceded what had been done. In fact, he rehearsed it. He referred to substantial increases in loan money for State works, including of course housing; Federal works; selected development projects; special non-repayable grants, most of which were in aid of employment; reduction of income tax; reduced sales tax on motor vehicles, which has produced the most extraordinary activity in the motor vehicle industry; increased employment benefit and investment allowances. He then disclosed the perfect, old-fashioned, dead-as-the-dodo socialist mind by saying, "Not one of these measures was designed to help the ordinary wage earners of this country." I hope that everybody in Australia will read that and ponder on it. Apparently, if we increase loan moneys, increase State works, increase housing and increase Federal works, this will be no good to the worker. That is his proposition. These activities have nothing to do with the wage earner. Development projects such as Mt. Isa, the Western Australian Railway or coal loading equipment at Gladstone and other ports, are no good to the wage earner. How odd that is. I always thought these things were done by having people work on the job and being paid for it, and by buying materials and having people paid to produce them. But the Leader of the Opposition says, "No, they are no good." He referred to the reduced sales tax on motor vehicles. I ask you, Sir. Here we had an industry that had sustained a considerable reduction of production as a result of the policies we found necessary and the reduced sales tax together with the general restoration of industrial help has enabled it to employ thousands and thousands more people, not only directly but indirectly. The leader of the socialist party stands up and says

Mr. O'Brien - Not socialist.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Is it not that any longer? Oh! He stands up and says that none of these things is any good to the wage earner. I leave it at that because I want to say something about some other matters. So far I have said only a little on the matter of putting the Government out. Now

I would like to say something about the problem of putting the Opposition in, which is the other object of the exercise. If Labour is to go in, I think it is essential that not only we but also the people of Australia should know where they stand on the great issues confronting this country. I have already explained that they do not quite know where they stand even on matters on which they attack us. But where do they stand on the matters on which I propose to attack them? They are putting themselves forward, as the alternative Government. Apparently they do so very confidently - more confident today than they will be in a month's time; more confident in a month's time than they will be in a year's time. They know. They are not so silly as all that. However, they are putting themselves forward as the new Government. Now, Sir, what kind of a Government would this Labour Government be?

Mr. Costa - A good one.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : If you are in it, I will be delighted. But what kind of a government would it be? The government, of course, would be the tired spokesman of 36 outsiders, none of them elected by the Australian people and any nineteen of them able to control the minds and the voices of a Labour government. As the honourable member for Higinbotham (Mr. Chipp) said this afternoon, this is what is called democracy. It may have been different in the days when Labour had strong leaders, but it is not today when Labour has leaders who bow in the corridors and who wait for their orders and who then proceed as best they can to carry out their orders. In other words, the country is not being offered by Labour a government of people who will attack problems, exercise their own judgments and stand by their judgment, but people who will look around the corner and say to these obscure nonentities who give them their orders, "Please, what is it we are allowed to do. That is as clear as a pikestaff, and if it needed to be made clear, my honourable friend with his deputy leader made it clear at the last Federal Conference of the Australian Labour Party. A more humiliating spectacle could hardly be imagined!

Mr. Pollard - That is not what you said to Bury. You said, "Do it or else".

SIR ROBERT MENZIES: That was a Prime Minister; he was the leader. He was not a Prime Minister who had to go away to 36 people and say, "Please oblige me by telling me."

Mr. Allan Fraser - You are a one-man government.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : The honourable member for Eden Monaro keeps muttering about a one-man government. If I am the Prime Minister of this country, I am the Prime Minister because the people have elected my supporters, who have chosen me. There is no parallel on my side of politics to this outside control by a group of 36, or any other number you care to choose, completely irresponsible people to whom the so-called leaders of the country would have to make their obeisance.

The next comment I make about the Australian Labour Party, which wants to come in, is: Where does it stand on Malaya? After all, this country is a pretty remote country in the world. This country, as the whole of experience has shown, cannot in great emergencies be its own sole defender. It must do its best, but it cannot be its own sole defender.

We have all found that time after time, and therefore we have a lively interest in what goes on ...

Mr. Uren - Who did you

SIR ROBERT MENZIES - If you do not mind - I know your views are so far left of mine that I see them in a sunset haze. I know the honourable member is a little touchy on this, because it is he who has said - it has been quoted - that there is nothing to fear from Communist China, it has no ambitions. It is like Hitler; it has no territorial ambitions. It is not pressing on South-East Asia. That is the view of the honourable member for Reid, but who accepts it? Who, looking at what goes on in South-East Asia, could believe such sorry nonsense for half a minute. It is important, therefore, to know where Labour stands on Malaya, which happens to be a British country and a country of the Commonwealth of Nations not so very far to our north, friendly and loyal.

The last decision they made - and I cannot discover that it has ever been altered - is that the Australian components of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaya should be withdrawn. Now, I will be delighted to know whether that is still true. Apparently it is. A great silence falls over the ranks of the Labour Party. So, let it be observed by everybody concerned that by their silence they admit that that is still their policy. They will be given an opportunity overnight to find out from - what is the chap's name? - Chamberlain. But after all, the last authentic remark on this issue was made by the honourable member for Parkes (Mr. Haylen) and as a front-bencher and as a loyal observer of the Constitution of the Labour Party what he said must be right. It must be official. He said, "We on this side of the chamber are assailed for saying that our troops ought to get out of Malaya. What has Malaya to do with us?"

This is the Labour Party! What has Malaya to do with us! In other words, we cannot, says the Labour Party, care less what happens in Malaya. We cannot care less if Malaya is over-run by the Communists. And, indeed, they had the non-aggressive Chinese Communists conducting activities of insurgency in Malaya and it was one of the honours of our battalion in Malaya from time to time to take part in resisting these people and in tracking them down. But the Labour Party says, "What has Malaya got to do with us?"

Take their attitude towards the creation of Malaysia. This is very well described in that splendid newspaper, the Melbourne "Age" only this morning in a leading article. I will undertake to read a few lines from what the newspaper said because it puts it to perfection. It said, speaking about the Labour Party and its policy, now handed out in writing in W.A. by the boss - weeks afterwards -

It believes in effective "decolonization"

It is extraordinary how left-wingwrs love these long words. Effective decolonization. The article continues -

"... of the three northern Borneo territories, but it passes no judgment on the proposal for incorporating British Borneo in Malaysia."

And that is true. Not a word about it. Silence. The Leader

of the Opposition incautiously said recently, when he was a free man, that he thought it was a good idea. But now now. Nothing but silence now on that front. The "Age" article continues -

"The Party's attitude towards Malaysia appears to the outsider to be mere double talk, and its failure to recognize the importance of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve suggests a refusal to face facts."

Then the "Age" goes on, charitably I think, to say -

"Flexibility is a useful quality in strange ways but it does not mean evading or postponing decisions. What the conference failed to give was a clearly formulated and presented foreign policy for a party which is Australia's alternative government."

And then, with a superb but delicate touch of irony, the "Age" article concludes -

"Its Parliamentary leaders were entitled to expect more"

I think this is gorgeous. I really think this is the finest journalistic sentence I have read this year -

"Normally the people expect the Parliamentary leaders of a great party to give a lead, to expound ideas in the party, to take decisions on policy."

Then the "Age" with all its charity, says in the final paragraph -

"What a pity, because the Parliamentary leaders of the Labour Party are not as other men. They have to be given something by Chamberlain and company and really it is very disappointing that they were not given more."

This, Sir, I think is not only a piece of delicate irony but in its fashion quite superb.

Now, Sir, my time goes on and therefore I pass on to the next thing on which I am curious about the Labour Party's attitude. The Labour Party, this prospective government, the one that wants to come into office -

Mr. Einfeld - Inevitably.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : I do not object, my dear fellow, to your cheering yourself up in this fashion. I would in your position. Personally I wish you well. I think you would make a very good whatever-it-is. The Labour Party wants to have a nuclear-free zone south of the equator. May I take it that that is still Labour Party policy?

Mr. Einfeld - Hear! Hear!

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Thank you very much. I knew that if I were nice to you, you would respond. This is still the Labour Party's policy. Of course, this idea of having an area south of the equator and round the world in which no nuclear weapons can be deployed sounds very attractive and a lot of Labour

people think that the people at large will be deceived into thinking that all that means is that Australia will not herself have nuclear weapons. Of course, that is just a pathetic outlook on it. The fact is that a nuclear-free zone south of the equator - if you could get away with it, if you could get the other people of the southern hemisphere to agree to it - would mean that no nuclear weapons could be deployed even in our defence, south of the equator.

Mr. Einfeld - No.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Oh! This is fascinating. So all we say to the United States of America, for example - a great nuclear power - or to Great Britain is: "We are not going to have you south of the equator except, of course, if we get into trouble. There is a level -

Mr. Einfeld - You are clowning about this.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : I am not clowning. I am talking about a matter so serious that you ought to be ashamed of yourself for treating it as a joke.

Mr. Einfeld - You are clowning.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Clowning! I am telling the Labour Party in this place that if their nuclear-free area south of the equator ever came into operation and were supported by the people of Australia, that would be national suicide. The trouble with the honourable member for Phillip (Mr. Einfeld) is that he will not face up to the facts. He likes to avoid them. The fact is - and do not run away from it too fast - that if we are going to have as our allies the United States of America and the United Kingdom - those great powers which have nuclear strength, one of which, the United States of America, possesses the Polaris submarines - which is a rude word with the Opposition - and will have them in the Indian Ocean, are we to say to them, "Look, whatever happens, you understand that no nuclear weapon is to be discharged by you or controlled by you from Australian territory, because the Labour Party says it is not to happen?" Therefore, if those peaceful Communist Chinese - the non-aggressors in Viet Nam and Laos ...

Mr. Pollard interjecting - -

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Listen for a while; it will do you no harm. If these people become involved in war and the United States of America is alongside of us, who stand right in the southward track of these movements, are we to say to them that although people north of the equator can use intercontinental ballistic missiles and other nuclear weapons no Australian government is going to allow the United States of America to use this as a base for counter attack? Does it not mean that? If it does not mean that, perhaps the honourable member for Phillip will be good enough some time to explain to us what it does mean.

Mr. Einfeld - I will give you instruction in this any time.

Mr. O'Brien - It will be very simple, too.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Yes, it will be very simple. I quite agree. The truth of the matter is that the Labour Party has to give up trying to have it both ways. You advocate a nuclear-free zone south of the equator, because this pleases your Communist supporters, and then, in the next breath, to satisfy your right-wingers, who are sensible and decent people, you say, "That does not mean what it says". What in the name of fortune does it mean?

Perhaps the honourable member for the Australian Capital Territory (Mr. J.R. Fraser) who is interjecting, might devote some of his attention to writing a powerful article for the "Canberra Times", explaining that this does not mean that nuclear weapons cannot be deployed from Australian territory, even though Australia is under attack. Mr. Speaker, if you can hear me over the gutter noises of East Sydney, I just want to say that the attitude of the Labour Party's conference to the North West Cape installation is of a piece with the isolationism exhibited in that party's attitude towards a nuclear-free zone. It is a natural corollary. Opposition members now say, I think, that by a vote of nineteen to seventeen they got something through which disappointed us. I hope they have all read what they got through.

You know, Sir, there is a very odd thing about this last Labour Party conference. On the matter of North West Cape - a matter of immediate and vital importance to the people of Australia - no written document was handed out at all. Did honourable members notice that? On the contrary, the master - naturally not the Leader of the Opposition - came out and read to the press, quite quickly, from a piece of paper. That is all they have ever had. I thought at the time, "This is pretty good, because this will always give them the opportunity of saying that they were misrepresented and that that was not what they decided." The other day, in the fastnesses of Perth ...

Mr. Harding - What is wrong with Perth?

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Nothing. It is one of the finest cities in Australia. I have always had an ambition to live there. I am thinking of that quite seriously. All I can say is that in the fastnesses of Perth the master produced, in writing, the decisions that the conference had made. There was nothing in the document about North West Cape. Of course, Sir, the whole basis of this thing is that the Labour Party has gone back, after a much better interlude at one time, to its isolationist attitude towards the problems of the world. It wants to say to the United States, "Certainly we do not mind your spending £35M on a radio communications station. That is very nice. Thank you very much. We do not mind your using it for naval communications in time of peace as long as we are the joint owners and managers, although we will not pay for it. But if the occasion occurs when you really need naval communications more than at any other time, then, although you are our associate in ANZUS and SEATO and we know, as people of common sense, that you and your friendship are vital to us, we want you to understand that you cannot use the station unless the Australian Government of the day happens to say that you can."

I have heard a lot of people saying that the establishment of this station is an invasion of our sovereignty. Our sovereignty has been invaded before, as the Labour Government

of the past well knows. I suppose it was an invasion of our sovereignty when all the forces in Australia were put under a foreign command. Nobody complained about that. It was a jolly good cause. Is it not a fact also that this technical sovereignty of ours was so far invaded that members of the American forces, although they were in Australia and might commit crimes in Australia, were removed from the jurisdiction of the Australian courts and placed under American jurisdiction? I am not complaining about that. I would have done exactly the same thing under the same circumstances. But this, we are now told, is the kind of thing that is an invasion of our sovereignty. The Labour Party of those days understood pretty well that to subtract from your own sovereignty by exercising it in favour of a friend is much more important than losing it all to an enemy.

Mr. McGuren - Who criticised the Government?

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : I do not know. I did not. If it is any comfort, I say to you now that that was right. Why do you now say it was wrong? We have heard all this cackle about sovereignty and we have heard it said that we must not allow the Americans to come in here and have rights. Finally, Sir, with three minutes to go

Mr. Armitage - Economic issues?

SIR ROBERT MENZIES - No. I am dealing with issues which you detest but which will determine in the minds of the Australian people whether you will get an opportunity to ruin this country. Apart from paying lip-service to the United Nations, where does the Labour Party stand? Why, it was only in 1955 that Dr. Evatt proposed to save £40M from the defence vote, so he obviously thought that it was much too much. The honourable member for Reid (Mr. Uren) pithily expressing himself in 1960, said, "Disarm!" In October, 1960, in the same debate, the honourable member for Lalor (Mr. Pollard) said that a police force, pending the arrival of the United Nations, was all that we needed. The honourable member for Lalor is a gallant and distinguished member of this Parliament. He is an old friend of mine. But he was exhibiting a point of view on this matter. In October, 1960, the honourable member for Yarra (Mr. Cairns) said that we should supply troops to the United Nations and nowhere else.

Now, Sir, how do you sum it all up? Here is a party that wants to be put into office. It is dubious and, indeed, isolationist in its attitude to defence. It has a dangerous attitude towards a nuclear-free zone. It has an unreal and evasive attitude on Malaya. It is divided on the reality of our association with the United States, as exemplified by the North-West Cape installation. Above all things, it has a dismal position as the humble but obedient servant - as the lackey, I think that is the Communist expression - of the outside body now famous in history as the 36.
