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BEFORE 8 PM (EST) ON WEDNESDAY, 25TH NOVEMBER

TELEVISION SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
THE RT. HON. SIR ROBERT MENZIES, OVER ALL
ABC NATIONAL TELEVISION STATIONS (EXCEPT
VICTORIA) ON WEDNESDAY, 25TH NOVEMBER, 1964

In his opening speech, I notice that Mr. Calwell covered a great variety of topics. I thought, in effect, that he repeated his policy speech of the last General Election.

Now, of course, this is not a General Election. This is a Senate Election, and it is not the occasion for new policies because you voted for us on a three-year policy only less than twelve months ago. But I think it is important to discover what is the real bone of contention on this occasion, and I am indebted to the Opposition for having made it quite clear what it regards as the bone of contention.

Now, the spokesman, the Member in charge of the Opposition's case against compulsory service was Mr. Fraser, Mr. A.D. Fraser, a very senior and experienced member of the Labour Party. He was put in charge of the Bill. What he said about the Bill represented the view of the Opposition, and when the Bill was through and had got to the Third Reading stage, he took the unusual course of speaking on the Third Reading and uttering one paragraph, but he did it with great deliberation so that everybody might notice it. Could I read it to you?

He said :

"We believe that the time has come for this issue - the issue of compulsion - to be transferred to the jury of the Australian people from this Parliament. That will enable the Australian people to do, as I am certain they will do at the Senate poll, namely, register their overwhelming opposition to the unlimited conscription of Australian youth in peace time for service on foreign battlefields under foreign commands and in wars to which Australia is not a party."

Now I am bound to believe that that is the Labour Party speaking through its trusted representative in the House, and so I would like just to have a look at it because this really exposes the whole error, the basic error of the Labour Party's approach to this matter.

In the first place, he said - do you remember? - I quote the precise words: "unlimited conscription". Well, of course, it isn't unlimited conscription. It applies to a limited and selected number of people out of a great number, a very large number. That is unavoidable if you want a limited intake. But I will pass on from that, it doesn't matter.

But this is in peace time, in peace time. Does the Labour Party really believe that we are living in a nice comfortable, leisurely time of peace? I pointed out in the House, when I announced the Defence Programme, that we are now in a state of rather more peril than we have been accustomed to in times of so-called peace. Can we really believe that

this is ordinary peace time, when at this moment in South Vietnam troops are engaged in combat, American forces are engaged in combat - American forces, of whom a quite reasonable percentage are draftees, or as we say, conscripts, fighting in South Vietnam. Can we really say it is a time of peace when we have our own people there helping? Can we really say that it is a time of peace when the North Vietnamese are attacking American forces both on sea and on land? Can we really say this is a time of peace when almost every few days Indonesian infiltrators go into Malaya, to say nothing of Malaysia, because they have been going into the Borneo Territories for some time, and now they have become bolder, and they land from time to time in Malaya itself. Can we say this is a time of peace?

This is a basic fallacy on the part of Labour, and indeed, Mr. Fraser admitted that these were not times of peace because in the next breath he said...."for service on foreign battlefields". "battlefields".... he acknowledges the existence of battlefields but he says this is a time of peace .

And then, of course, above all, he says that these are wars, these are wars, the ones in which our own people are to serve "to which Australia is not a party". Now this, of course, denies the whole existence of our alliances. It denies the existence of the South-East Asian Treaty, in which we have as partners, Great Britain, the United States and a variety of Asian countries, and there in what we now call SEATO we have obligations, and it is because of SEATO that we have men at this moment in South Vietnam and that we have men at this moment in Thailand, troops in Thailand, that we have troops - air forces - in Malaya. Does the Labour Party seriously suggest that we are not a party to these matters. We are bound by treaty, by honourable obligation, and in the same way, we are bound by honourable obligation, declared by us in this Parliament and approved by you at the last election, to come to the aid of Malaysia under unwarranted attack from the forces and the leaders of Indonesia.

You see what I mean? To talk about wars to which Australia is not a party - you see, I come back to the very words .. "to which Australia is not a party" - is to deny all reality. If we are not a party to these matters, what are we doing there? How do we come to be there? Because we have treaties and honourable obligations and we don't come of a nation that is accustomed to dishonouring its treaties or its obligations.

And if you come a little nearer home and look at our side of New Guinea - Papua and New Guinea in which we have a tremendous trust obligation for millions of relatively primitive people, you will find that we have declared that we will defend the frontiers of New Guinea and Papua just as we would the frontiers of our own country. Suppose an attack came that way, would the Labour Party say this is a war to which Australia is not a party? Don't they realise that any attack on our Territories in the Pacific invokes the operations of the great ANZUS pact to which the United States is a party?

I wonder what would happen to us, my friends, if we adopted the Labour view and if we took up the attitude that what happens in South-East Asia is no business of ours, even that what happens in New Guinea is no business of ours, And suppose the United States said, "All right, if that goes for you, it goes for us. If you're not a party to these

military obligations, why should we be? If you can renounce your obligations, why can't we renounce ours?" And not one of us will take very much persuasion, will we, that if we were, in fact, deserted in this part of the world by the great powers who can command the greatest strength in the world for our protection, then we would be not only lonely but our future could well be destroyed.

Don't let us have foolish talk as if we were living in the halcyon summer of unbroken peace. We are not. We are living in a dangerous period in the world's history and we must, at this time above all times, have clear thinking and resolute action in relation to our own security.
