

PUBLIC MEETING, KOOYONG BY-ELECTION

KEW TOWN HALL, MELBOURNE

28TH MARCH 1966

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt :

I have heard a lot of people here tonight calling out "Let's have a referendum" but you know they are the same people who won't even let us have a meeting. There is not much point in having a referendum if we can't have a meeting.

My purpose here tonight - and I won't, of course, be deterred from it by the noise of those who come here to break up a meeting - is to speak in support of our Liberal candidate, Andrew Peacock, who has been selected by the Liberal Party to succeed a very great Australian who represented this electorate with great distinction for more than thirty years. Kooyong has a reputation for returning to the Federal Parliament very great men. You gave us Sir John Latham, who proved to be one of the outstanding figures in the history of our Federation. And then followed Sir Robert Menzies who established an all-time record term of office as Prime Minister of this country. And so when it came to find a worthy successor to Sir Robert Menzies, the people of Kooyong, in a democratic ballot, selected from those who were offering a young man who had already established his political wisdom and capacity to a point where at a comparatively early age he had been selected as the State President of the Liberal Party in Victoria.

Now a young man who enjoys the confidence of his fellow citizens and members of the same party sufficiently to be selected as their State leader in what has been a stronghold of Liberalism in Australia is a young man quite clearly who possesses exceptional political qualities, and that is the candidate that we are offering from the Liberal Party to the electors of Kooyong on this occasion.

Now tonight, ladies and gentlemen - and I am speaking now not only to those of you in this hall but the many thousands of you who are listening to the broadcast of tonight's proceedings - the issue in this campaign is not whether you have a change of government; this is a by-election - but this by-election provides not merely the opportunity to return a very able man to the national Parliament but it does provide an opportunity for an Australian electorate to offer a view on what is clearly the most outstanding public issue of this time. And the public issue can be divided into two parts for tonight's purposes.

One is whether Australia should or should not be in South Viet Nam with troops, and a considerable section of this audience, not all of whom I suspect come from Kooyong, has indicated very clearly that they think Australia should not be in South Viet Nam, and in adopting that view they are, of course, echoing the view of the Australian Labor Party and its Parliamentary representatives in Canberra. Well at least then, we have that much established. Those who are making the noise are supporters of the Australian Labor Party and they oppose our being in Viet Nam.

On the other hand, the other three parties represented in the National Parliament : the Liberal Party, the Country Party and the Democratic Labor Party, all believe that Australia should be represented in South Viet Nam and should be engaged in assisting the communist aggression which threatens the people of that country. So here tonight we have a number of people, supporters of the Labor Party, the one party represented in the National Parliament which is opposed to Australia's participation in South Viet Nam. Of course there is one party outside the National Parliament, and I suspect that that party is well represented here tonight also; that, of course, is the Communist Party. It too believes that we should not be in South Viet Nam.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, here is a national line-up. Three political parties saying Australia should be fighting communist aggression in South Viet Nam, and two parties - the Australian Labor Party and the Communist Party saying that Australia should keep out of South Viet Nam. All right, if that is one of the great national issues on which the Labor Party wants to fight an election, then this government accepts that challenge quite gladly.

Somebody says "What about a referendum?". Of course this wasn't Mr. Calwell's story when we passed the legislation. At the time when we passed the legislation on National Service, the Labor Party then said that the forthcoming Senate election was going to be the testing election of the Government's policy on National Service, and that election was held in 1964, and in only one State did the Labor Party secure a majority of the votes on that occasion. And so, having fought the Senate election of 1964 on this particular issue, the Labor Party refuses to accept the verdict given at that time. Well, then, let that be the case. For our part, we welcome the fact that this campaign provides yet another opportunity to examine - I would have hoped - to examine calmly and carefully the issues which are involved in this campaign, but unfortunately there are some who have come here tonight determined to prevent a clear and coherent account being given of what is involved. However, thanks to these mechanical aids to good sense and to good government, I shall be able to speak to many people outside this hall who will only be affected to a minor degree by the species of entertainment which have been provided around various sections of this audience.

Now Sir, Mr. Chairman, the reason why Australia is represented in South Viet Nam is first because we and our allies have resisted communist aggression wherever we have found it. We resisted it in Berlin. We resisted it in the threat from Cuba. We resisted it in Korea. We saved Taiwan from being overrun by Chinese communists. And we have resisted it now in South Viet Nam. We know fully well that if Chinese communism succeeds in South Viet Nam, then Chinese communism will spread unchecked through the mainland of South East Asia and we can surrender the whole of this vital area of the world to communist overlordship.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, this issue has been clear enough to the Australian people for a very long time and they have given the Government staunch support in the action which it has taken. The Government does not take its action as if somehow the members of the Cabinet lived in a vacuum. We act, not only on the soundest military advice we can secure, we act on the advice and the information reaching us from a wide variety of sources, from our own diplomatic sources, from the governments of other countries, from the Defence Committee which includes in its membership not merely the Chiefs of Staff but which includes in its membership - I am afraid this lady is behaving in a very unladylike fashion. It is not often that a lady intrudes where she hasn't been invited. I hope that nobody tries to treat her with other than sympathy for obviously there is a quite imperfect knowledge of the issues involved for this country and the action which should be taken regarding them.

Now, I am not surprised that here tonight in what we are assured by the Labor Party is a democracy - and of course they may well believe that to be so, because when Mr. Calwell spoke in this campaign, he was given a very attentive hearing. May I repeat that: When Mr. Calwell spoke in this campaign, he was given a very attentive hearing. I wonder why his supporters deny to the candidate here tonight, Andrew Peacock, and to myself a reasonable opportunity to put the Government's case. I mean, what are they afraid of? Can't they stand up to the facts? Aren't they prepared to hear the case which the Government is quite able to give, convincingly enough, I think, even to shake those who have come here with the most rigid Labor support in their minds. And I want them to give me just this opportunity. I heard one or two calling out "All the way with LBJ". Yes, there he is. "All the way with LBJ".

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I would think it was well known to the meanest intelligence that Australia, a country of less than 12 million people, inhabiting a continent the size of the United States, could not hope to defend itself against aggression entirely from its own resources. That should be quite obvious I should think to the meanest intelligence. And the action which contributed most to the security of the Australian people was the action of the Menzies Government in negotiating the ANZUS Treaty and the South East Asian Treaty. These two treaties contribute more to Australia's security than anything else that could be named. These treaties assure us that should we be attacked by an aggressor we can look to powerful allies to bring us the strength of their support in resisting that aggression. Now, once this fact has been grasped, and I hope that you are able to grasp it quite firmly, then the Labor platform becomes all the more significant and I am going to read to you for a moment the Labor Party platform on defence. I wonder whether our noisy friends will at least allow me to tell this audience the Labor Party platform on defence. Well let me read it to you. Now allow me please.

This is taken from the official printed platform of the Australian Labor Party under the heading of Defence :-

"Australia's national policy must be to ensure her territorial security, the security of her overseas trade and her development as an independent but co-operative nation. The nation's defence must be so arranged that the intention of Australia to defend itself to the limits of its ability is clear beyond all doubt to our own people, to our allies and to any potential aggressor. The development by negotiation of a regional defence system of United Nations Member States within the South East Asian and Indian sub-continental areas for mutual defence consistent with the requirements of the United Nations Charter and not inconsistent with the general provisions of Australia's existing defence treaty commitments. Labor's defence and foreign policies are based on the conviction that war can and must be prevented and Australia has a part to play in its prevention. Australia demands the right to consultation in the great decisions of peace and war."

Now this is the final sentence and I want you to listen to this final sentence :-

"Labor will honour and support Australia's treaties and defence alliances."

Now that is a very now wait a minute. That is a very important sentence, but the significant thing is that that sentence appears in the platform of the Labor Party for 1963 and 1964, but it has been dropped from the platform of the Labor Party in 1965, and I say, Sir, that this Australian Labor Party under its present leadership has no intention of honouring Australia's treaties and alliances with those with whom it has engaged This provision that I have referred to was deliberately dropped from the platform of the Australian Labor Party and I suggest to Mr. Calwell and to Mr. Whitlam, his doubtful deputy, I suggest to Mr. Calwell and to Mr. Whitlam that they occupy the remainder of this by-election campaign explaining to the Australian people why the Labor Party has dropped from its platform the sentence which says "Labor will honour and support Australia's treaties and defence alliances".

Now, ladies and gentlemen, if this by-election has done nothing else it has at least brought out into the open that the Australian Labor Party, without any flourish of trumpets and without the Australian public being fully aware of this matter until it has appeared in this rather obscure way, the Australian Labor Party has dropped from its platform its undertaking to honour and support Australia's treaties and defence alliances. All right, we now know where the Labor Party stands on South Viet Nam. They don't stand with the United States and the Allies and the South Vietnamese and they don't stand by the treaties and alliances which we, for Australia's protection, have freely entered into.

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Now let me move to the next point. The next point that I want to deal with is why did we find it necessary to introduce a National Service scheme. As is well known, the Australian Government decided some years ago that Australia should establish and maintain a well-equipped, highly mobile Regular Army, Navy and Air Force. And over recent years we have increased the strength of the Navy, the Air Force and the Army. In 1964, after a period in which Indonesia had embarked on a policy of confrontation against Malaysia, a country to which Australia had given an undertaking to assist in its defence, and at a time when Communist pressures were increasing in South Viet Nam, in Laos, in Cambodia, in Thailand, in other parts of South East Asia, the Government decided that Australia should increase our Regular Army components. Now at that time the target was 22,500 men, and a decision was taken to build this total up to 37,500.

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Now, Sir, at that time we were engaging on an active campaign of advertising for volunteers. We were offering improved conditions and terms of service, and no one can seriously argue that the conditions and terms of service are unfavourable or unattractive because the fact of the matter is that Army men who come to the end of their period of service are re-engaging at what is a very high percentage rate. The figure at the moment is higher, the percentage of re-engagement is actually higher in the Army than it is in the Air Force or the Navy. It is a percentage of 70, and 70% of re-engagement is one of the highest figures in the history of the Australian Army. And so this defeats any argument that there are not sufficiently attractive pay and conditions offering for the Regular Army.

So you look for the reason elsewhere and the reason why we are not getting all the volunteers that we require is to be found in two directions. The first is that in a fully employed society, with plenty of opportunities offering for our young men, in a country that doesn't have a military tradition, you don't have a great number of young men offering for an Army career, and the number offering over the last three years has been in the neighbourhood of 8,500 young men. But the Army if it is maintaining a small Regular Army has to have a highly efficient Army, a very fit Army, a well-trained Army, and people who can measure up to the demands of the various and varied diverse circumstances that a mobile Army group will have to meet in various parts of South East Asia. And so we found in practice that out of some 8,500 volunteers less than 2,500 were regarded as measuring up to the standard which the Army required. Now this operated right through the three years leading up to the changeover to National Service and when the decision was taken and it was a decision taken against a background of the highest advice we could secure, the strategic advice of our own Defence Committee, the Defence Committee consisting of the Chiefs of Staff of the three Services, the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the Permanent Head of the Prime Minister's Department, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Permanent Head of the Department of External Affairs. Now these people are the top advisers that the Government can secure and based on their strategic view of the worsening circumstances and situation in South East Asia they recommended a substantial increase in the Armed Services and the equipment available to the Armed Services.

The Chief of Staff of the Army pointed out to us that if we wished to increase our troops from 22,500 to 37,500 then the voluntary system would give us merely an additional 750 people a year, and quite obviously we wouldn't build up to the desired target on the basis of 750 people a year. And it was at this point, Mr. Chairman, that a Government which has the responsibility for the national security of the Australian people decided that a system of National Service was essential in the interests of our people.

Sir, could any party, has any political party in the history of Australia been humiliated and treated with such contempt as the Australian Labor Party's Federal Parliamentary Party was by the Federal Executive of that Party. Never in the history of the Australian people has a political party been treated with such contempt and been publicly humiliated in the way that the Federal Parliamentary Party of the A.L.P. has over these recent months and this, Sir, is the Party that says to the people of Kooyong in this campaign elect us, put the Government out and put us in, put in a Party that has no defence policy, that has no foreign policy, that goes along with the noisier members of this audience in attacking Australia's alliance with the United States. These, Sir, are the people that ask the Australian Government and people to allow them to govern the Australia of today. Sir, there cannot be any doubt as to where Australians come out on this particular issue.

Now you have a chance to show your support for a splendid candidate who will represent Kooyong ably and for long in the years ahead. I would have liked tonight, ladies and gentlemen, to have given you the positive side of the Government's programme in the domestic field. I would very much have liked to have had the opportunity to tell you of the positive side to the campaign in South Viet Nam because, as President Johnson pointed out in Honolulu when he met the courageous leader of the South Vietnamese people, we are determined that out of the struggle in South Viet Nam will come a reconstruction, a rehabilitation, a new economic and social order which will be a model and example to other countries in South East Asia. Now, Sir, this becomes possible if Communism can be resisted. This is what has occurred in Korea, this is what has been done in Taiwan, two countries rescued from Communist aggression and this is what can be done in South Viet Nam if we are able to hold in check the cancerous scourge of Communism.

Now Communism is a cancerous scourge - you either check the cancerous scourge of Communism, you check it, you eradicate it, or your victim goes under as it spreads its deadly poisonous effect through the victim concerned, and this is what has happened in so many of the enslaved countries of Central Europe and this, but for the strength and resolution of the American people is what would be happening in South East Asia today.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a significant thing that in addition to all the countries which are giving their military and material aid in South East Asia, three distinguished Presidents of the United States, President Eisenhower, President Kennedy and President Johnson all have taken the same view of the necessity of resisting aggression in that country and we in Australia can feel deeply grateful for the resolution, the strength of purpose, the firmness of mind of the President of the United States, President Johnson, for his determination to see these issues through in South Viet Nam.

Now, Sir, there are some 80,000 odd young men in the 20-year age group. And the total of National Servicemen required was some 8,400, approximately one tenth of the total number of people who reach that particular age and incidentally, it is of interest to know that in the task force that will be going to South Viet Nam there will be approximately 30% of the membership of that task force drawn from the National Service component.

Now, right from the outset, it was intended that the National Service trainee should go into a Regular Army unit and in that army unit serve on the same pay, the same terms and the same conditions as the Regular Army Servicemen. But, having then gone into that Regular unit, they should go wherever that particular Army unit was placed - some will be placed on various duties inside Australia, some will go to Malaysia, some will go to Viet Nam. If any trouble develops in our own Territory of Papua and New Guinea then others would be required in Papua and New Guinea. But where assisting the Regular Army troops, the people who represent Australia's contribution to our own security in this part of the world, they, Sir, will be supported by this comparatively small component of National Servicemen.

Now, Sir, those National Servicemen are required to serve in regular service for a period of two years, and, as to overseas service in South Viet Nam, quite obviously just as only a fraction of the 20-year-olds will ever be called up for National Service so also only a fraction of those actually called up will be required to serve outside Australia, whether in Viet Nam or elsewhere. The tour of duty in South Viet Nam is one year, after which they would return to Australia. That in essence is the scheme and the reason why it was found necessary to introduce that scheme.

Now the Labor Party has offered no alternative. What is the alternative policy of the Labor Party? First of all it says pull our troops out of South Viet Nam. It dropped from its platform the clause which says it will honour its treaties and its alliances, so it leaves Australia without treaty assistance and it leaves Australia without the friendship of those who would feel some obligation to us because in their time of peril we have given them assistance to resist the communist aggression directed against them. Now there in essence, ladies and gentlemen, is the issue on which the Labor Party chooses to fight this campaign. They cloud these issues over of course with an emotional smoke-screen. They try to tell the mothers of this country that their boys are going to be taken away for indefinite periods of time, that this is something which is going to apply to the young manhood of this country. They paint the most harrowing picture and, Sir, if I thought that the Australian Labor Party represented the feeling of the Australian people then I would despair for this country, but I am quite certain that this Australian Labor Party will go down in history as the weakest, the most irresponsible, the most unrealistic of all the political parties which have ever carried an honourable name in Australia.

Mr. Calwell tells us that this is an unwinnable war - what sort of national leader -- when we know we have on our side in this issue the United States of America, the people of this country, the people of other countries who are giving military support and the South Vietnamese themselves who have more than 200,000 regular troops in the armed forces of that country -- what manner of national leader is it who tells the Australian people that this is an unwinnable war. This is the man who wouldn't even support his own Labor Leader, John Curtin, when John Curtin thought it was necessary in the interests of Australia to call up national Servicemen. This is the man who now comes before you and says that he would be the leader of the Australian people at a time when the pernicious, corroding, erosive, influence of Communism is spreading through Europe and is spreading through Africa and is spreading through the countries of South East. Asia. Yes, but unfortunately Arthur Calwell is not. This is my deep complaint.

Our friend here thinks that times are changing. Of course they are. They have changed since the days of the conscription of 1916/17. Arthur Calwell has never got outside the atmosphere of that campaign. They have changed since the days of the depression period of the 1930's, when a Labor Government couldn't cope with the economic situation of that time. Here most of you in this room, most of those of you screaming here tonight, have never known anything but full employment thanks to this Government. No government in the history of Australia has ever kept its people employed, fully employed, in the way this Government has done. No country in the history of Australia has given the standard of living that this country has done. In Labor's last year of office they provided £90M- \$180M- for social welfare. That was Labor. We, Sir, in our last Budget, provided \$940M - against \$180M for Labor - we provided \$940M, so this Government has built the economy of Australia so that we can support a considerable defence effort, we can support the most rapid rate of development in the history of this nation and we can support the highest level of social welfare that this country has ever known.

Why is it that around the world Oh, I know, they don't want to hear this, they don't want to hear it, of course they don't want to hear it but they cannot deny that these are the facts and these are the facts that Mr. Calwell and his parliamentary colleagues are not prepared to stand up to. This is why, although there are many issues on which this campaign in Kooyong should be fought, they want the smoke-screen of the one issue. They won't fight the election in Kooyong over the broad fields of government policies they want to concentrate on the one item of policy and they organise this kind of undemocratic demonstration, this kind of demonstration worthy of the totalitarian countries for which their sympathies have been so plainly evidenced.

Sir, does Mr. Calwell who was given an uninterrupted and attentive hearing in the meeting he opened in this campaign, does Mr. Calwell and that notable democrat, Mr. Whitlam, the dagger man, does he believe that this is the way in which Labor supporters should show how a political meeting should be conducted. I am quite certain that those

who came here to disrupt this meeting have gained many supporters for the Liberal cause. If there were any doubters in this audience tonight as to how their vote should be cast, then after tonight's performance there will be no doubt that they will be voting for a government that can maintain order at home and order abroad. They are not going to hand this country over to the rabble supporters of a rabble government. The Labor Party in Canberra today is a rabble party - can anyone who has witnessed the events in the last few months describe it as other than a rabble party desperately trying to find a leader that they can support with any species of loyalty. They cannot support Calwell - they don't believe he is the man for leader, they cannot support Whitlam because they don't think he is a man that they can trust, and they cannot find a candidate inside the Labor Parliamentary Party that they are prepared to back for their leadership. And so a rabble party which offers Australia a rabble government turns to its rabble supporters and says go out and wreck the meeting of the one government that can conduct Australia to security and prosperity in these difficult times.

So ladies and gentlemen, I think most of us tonight have got the essence of the message that we have been trying to get over to you. You don't have to hear from Andrew Peacock because you know that this young man has shown the qualities of character, of intelligence and of leadership which at this age have brought him to the election in the position of President of the State Division of the Liberal Party of Australia, and this young man in a first class field of candidates which offered themselves for the selection for this notable seat he had the handsome votes which brought him here as your candidate tonight.

Now Kooyong has been notable for its illustrious representation and I am quite certain that following Sir John Latham, Sir Robert Menzies and the men who preceded them will be a splendid candidate who enjoys the support of a most charming, gracious and attractive young wife. These young people will not only be an ornament for the electors of Kooyong but they will be assets of great value to the National Parliament in Canberra. I wish, Andrew, continuing success to you in the years ahead. I know that you will be a welcome addition to our ranks in Canberra. You are typical of the young vigorous, able and intelligent young men and women who are rallying in their thousands today to the Australian people. And not only are the young people rallying to us, but the trade unionists of this country are rallying to us in increasing numbers. The Labor Party used to claim to represent the trade unionists of this country but, Sir, we would not be in office here today unless hundreds of thousands of men and women in the trade unions of this country voted for us regularly, election after election.

And this party, this Liberal Party, this great national party, can claim to be truly representative of all sections of the Australian people. We are not a class conscious party envisaged by the memories of long ago struggles which seem to have poisoned the minds of Mr. Calwell and so many

of his supporters. This is a young party with a young outlook for the great future of a great country and it is with the help of able young men of courage and character like Andrew Peacock that we shall build a great Australia to which the Liberal Party will have made a notable contribution of leadership and wise political guidance and policy development.

Ladies and gentlemen, give this young man, this very able and very courageous young man, a flying start on a long and notable political career by a bumper vote - not merely victory, we know he is going to win - but give him a vote of which he and we and all of us can be proud when he comes to the poll in the next week.
