

EMBARGOED UNTIL 7.30 P.M. 23rd NOVEMBER, 1966

THE GREAT ISSUES

A SUMMING UP BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. HAROLD HOLT

Most of you no doubt have already made up your minds about this election. But, with the campaign nearly at an end, I put quite briefly and simply what I see as the great issues on which your decision and support should be given.

In my Policy Speech I said that how we are to carry forward the development of this continent and how best we can make the nation secure, forms the very core of this campaign.

As the campaign has proceeded this has emerged, even more strongly.

You will not only be electing a Government on November 26. One way or another you will be writing a new chapter in our history. I say this because so much is at stake. This, like the election of 1949, is truly a crossroads election. The choice we Australians make will be a critical and decisive choice. There is no common meeting ground between us and the Labor Party on profoundly important matters affecting the safety of this country and its people.

Today we have a shield behind which we can press on with the task of building the nation to a bigger future - a future with exciting opportunities for yourselves and for your children.

Our alliance with the United States is the centre piece of this shield. It strengthens our close defensive association with Great Britain and other allies.

With this shield, it has been, and is, our purpose to keep far from our own shores the sinister aggression that has made a battleground of South Vietnam.

That is why I say you will be writing a new chapter of Australian history on Saturday.

The Labor Party would pull down this shield of security. Defence and foreign policies - if they can be described as policies - announced in the Labor Party's Policy Speech would not only abandon our allies and South Vietnam; they would undermine our whole system of alliances, they would gravely imperil American friendship, they would wreck our home-front plans and our defence arrangements.

Our reputation abroad would be damaged, perhaps beyond repair. Indeed, the Labor Party has not only reaffirmed its disastrous isolationism; it would now destroy almost everything we have so painstakingly built up over our years of office.

And what would they put in its place? They are hopelessly vague on this - and divided in their views. They would leave us with virtually nothing! Our alliances would lie in ruins - our defence arrangements would be gravely weakened. On all that Mr. Calwell has told us, a Labor Government would wait for an aggressor to strike at

this country and then call on Australians to go it alone.

To propose such a course is an insult to the good sense of the Australian electorate.

I now ask you to look closely at the programme outlined in the Labor Party's Policy Speech.

In recent months, Mr. Calwell has been very vocal about our external policies. He has said many times that his Party would sink or swim on the question of Vietnam. But when he came to putting all this on the line in a Policy Speech, Vietnam, National Service, defence and foreign policy were brushed off in a few sentences.

He persists in declaring that what is happening in South Vietnam is a civil war. There are certainly South Vietnamese amongst the Viet Cong, but he ignores the fact that the Viet Cong do not control or administer any one of the many cities or towns. By processes of terror, plunder and harassment, they are able to exercise influence over some of the thousands of villages and hamlets. He ignores the participation of some eighty per cent of South Vietnamese voters in the recent election for those who are to draft the creation of a constituent assembly. He ignores the evidence - accepted by detached observers from other free countries - that it was aggression from North Vietnam directed by the Communist Government of Hanoi under Ho Chi Minh which touched off the current hostilities. He ignores the growing infiltration by regular North Vietnamese forces recently estimated by General Westmoreland to be proceeding at a rate of up to 7,000 a month. He ignores the continuing supply of arms, munitions, food and equipment from the North. He sees no connection between what is happening in South Vietnam and the declared philosophy of Communist expansion through South East Asia - and, indeed, Asia generally - so clearly and repeatedly expressed by the present Communist leaders of China.

To him all this is just a civil war. Three American Presidents and the governments of free countries in South East Asia, including Australia and New Zealand, have taken a very different view of what is occurring in South Vietnam. When you turn to his Policy Speech proposals there is the same evident lack of realism. He criticises our Government for spending - and I quote him - "Too much money on expensive, sophisticated defence equipment purchased overseas". He clearly has in mind such items as the F111 Bombers and the guided missile destroyers, purchased from the United States of America. Perhaps also the submarines purchased from Great Britain. But Australia, with comparatively small regular forces, must see that they are thoroughly trained, mobile and as well equipped as we can assure. His policy would not only be very much more costly. It would involve intolerable delays. It would leave our forces inadequately equipped for several years.

The effect of Mr. Calwell's proposals for the army need to be clearly understood. He claims there is no difficulty in separating conscripts from members of the regular army. This is nonsense. If National Servicemen were withdrawn from integrated units in Vietnam the fighting capability of the task force would be destroyed. If you take a substantial number of men out of a battalion, it would not remain

a fighting unit. You can't put two bits of two battalions together and immediately have a fighting unit capable of engaging the enemy. It is necessary for the men to work together and to exercise together to bring the unit to battle efficiency. Mr. Calwell's proposal would leave the task force inoperative and ineffective. It could leave it incapable of defending itself within the area of its responsibility.

He has stated his Party's intention of consulting with the United States before bringing out the rest of the force. This could well become a plea for United States protection for our force pending full withdrawal. But even on this matter of consultation he is out of sorts with Mr. Whitlam - his Deputy Leader.

The end of National Service would reduce the regular army strength to something between twenty-four thousand and twenty-five thousand. We would not be able with this number to fulfil our agreements with our allies nor our commitments. Our capacity to contribute towards the security of South East Asia would be gravely weakened both in terms of the numbers available for this purpose and our standing with our allies and friends.

One effect of the National Service scheme has been to increase the strength of the Citizen Military Forces from the addition of those young men who have chosen service with the C.M.F. as an alternative to the possibility of call-up into National Service. If the National Service scheme was abandoned then the incentive to join the C.M.F. goes with it.

Yet Mr. Calwell is relying on a large militia force to safeguard Australia. He says he will rely entirely upon volunteers.

In 1964 the pay and conditions of service of an Australian private were so improved that he is more highly paid in his early years of service than his counterparts in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. How is Mr. Calwell going to get volunteers of the numbers and desired standard when our best efforts did not succeed.

The Labor Party's policy would destroy the unity and the morale of the army.

Australia has great hopes of making a significant place for itself in the future of the free countries of Asia. For us now to run out on our allies in Vietnam would be to destroy, at one stroke, much of the goodwill we now possess. It is doubtful if we would ever regain their trust in us and respect for us.

Mr. Calwell is the first Australian political leader I can recall to advocate desertion of our allies as a national policy. I refuse to believe he will find support in Australia for such a course.

When he turned to domestic policy, like a salesman at the Show, the Leader of the Labor Party opened a bag full of promises that were really right out of this world.

I am sure all of you who heard him quickly lost count of the millions upon millions of dollars he proclaimed himself ready to spend.

He talked about money as if it were confetti. Apparently it didn't cross his mind that he was talking to people who have to pay taxes. I am sure that as you listened you began instinctively to estimate what all this was likely to cost you.

Your instinct was right. On top of a Budget deficit this year of 270 million dollars, the Labor Party would impose a programme which could cost up to another 1,000 million dollars. What fantasy! If a Labor Government went about doing what it has promised to do, taxation and charges would go sky-high. Our economic stability would be wrecked.

So it is fair to say that the Labor Party offers Australia a destructive deal on the two fronts that are vital to us - our foreign relations and our home affairs.

If, as I've said, Australia's growth and development, and its security, make up the core of this campaign, the Labor Party has failed the nation. On both counts it must be rejected by responsible opinion.

We shall, with your support, put into effect a realistic, forward-looking domestic programme. We have always regarded our broad policies as continuing policies and we have always done more than we have undertaken to do.

We shall hold fast to our alliances and our defence arrangements. We shall make stronger the shield of our security. We are determined to pursue with our friends the Goals of Freedom we proclaimed together at the Manila Conference only a few weeks ago.

Here are those goals:

- . To be free from aggression
- . To conquer hunger, illiteracy and disease
- . To build a region of security, order and progress
- . To seek reconciliation and peace throughout Asia and the Pacific

We are determined to grow strong ourselves and we want to see free Asia grow strong also.

Here is a partnership in a common defence of freedom. Here is a common aspiration for progress. Here is a prospect for that better world order that lies within man's grasp. The alternative offered to you is isolationism - and a walkout on our friends.

My Government is accused by the Labor Party Leader of squandering the lives of Australia's sons. Who is it would squander them? My answer is it would be the Government which first allowed our alliances to be reduced to pieces of paper by failing to give substance to them: the Government which stood passively by while one after another of our neighbours was conquered by aggressive communism: the Government that would leave us standing alone: the Government which would fail to provide our armed forces with the most effective arms and equipment available in the world today. Such a Government would truly be putting the lives of young Australians at risk - and at risk also - the way of life and liberties of all Australians.

Surely Australia will reject this alternative. As your Prime Minister, I ask you to support my Government and my Party. We offer you strength, unity and purpose. We offer this as opposed to disunity and confusion. Your support for us on Saturday will promote your own well-being, will sustain Australia's national interest and will preserve our high standing throughout the world.

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