

ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE NSW DIVISION
OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF AUSTRALIA

SYDNEY, N. S. W.

19 SEPTEMBER 1970

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. Attwell, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen :

It is not my intention to speak to you for very long because I hope that tonight, having spoken to you for a short time, we will be able to spend a much longer time in a question and answer session, in which those of you who are here and who are the backbone of the Liberal Party will have the opportunity to raise those matters which are on your minds, and to give me the opportunity to try to answer the queries and the questions and the criticisms you may have. I feel that that perhaps is the way in which we can get the greatest value from this meeting, and I hope that when the time comes you will be not at all backward in raising those matters which are foremost in your minds.

But before that time does come, there are some things I would like to say. Mr President, we have been in office, as a government in Australia, for twenty-one years or a little more. They were twenty-one years in which there have been three wars - first Korea, then the Malayan emergency and now Vietnam. And they were twenty-one years in which there was great national development and unprecedented industrial progress. There has been a greater increase in the population of Australia than any other country has had, except Asian countries, in a similar period of time. It has been a period of greatly expanded trade, a period in which our exports, particularly our secondary exports, have been greatly expanded, and a period of growing involvement with that area of Asia to which we find ourselves contiguous and which will be so important for future generations of Australians.

It has been, too, a period of improvement of the living standards of all Australians and of improvement for the population generally. It has been a period of greatly expanded social services and of greatly expanded opportunity for the individual to express himself to the top of his bent. I think we have all helped to bring this about over this period of time, because of some basic philosophies.

When we came into office, we stood for the right of the individual to engage in the occupation of his choice, and to so conduct himself in that occupation as he believed best. We stood against the concept that the individual ought to be told by the state how he could conduct his enterprise or whether he could conduct his enterprise, because at that time, as now, our opponents held to the idea that there should be limitations on the individual in conducting his enterprise, that there should be some fields in which he could not enter that government knew better than an individual what is good for that individual. We stood against that.

We stood for the concept that the Government should create a climate where individual enterprise was encouraged. We didn't stand for laissez-faire, and we don't stand for it now. But we stood for a concept that we could create a climate where individual enterprise was encouraged and where the planning of enterprise and its expansion was a matter for the myriad individuals engaged in the myriad enterprises which make up Australian life. And we stood against the concept that all planning in all fields should be undertaken by a government or governments and forced upon the citizens of this country.

We stood for a political system where elected representatives of a party should themselves decide the policies to be followed by that party, and we stood against the system which made elected representatives subject to direction and instruction from unelected persons from outside. And that we were right in these attitudes is, I believe, evident from the results of this past twenty or nearly twenty-one years.

And those things that we stood for then, we stand for now. The things we stood against we still stand against and our opponents still stand for the planning by governments of all enterprise, for, in cases, the prohibition of individuals entering an enterprise, and until just recently for the direction of elected representatives by persons who are non-elected from outside. I say "until just recently" because there is an admission from our opponents that in at least one State - that of Victoria - this was what applied. And personally, I do not believe that they will change this but time alone will tell.

Sir, in the last few years - in the last three years - many new problems have appeared for Australia. We have found ourselves in a situation where the United Kingdom, under whose protection we have, as a nation, lived, is withdrawing from Malaysia and Singapore, the countries to our North. And although that has been slightly altered by a change of Government in the United Kingdom, still there is only a token force left behind compared to the responsibility previously assumed by the United Kingdom Government.

And we have found ourselves in a situation where the United States of America is questioning its approach to, and its involvement in, the problems of Asia. These two things alone have vastly changed the world in which Australia lives. And so our defence has necessarily had to occupy our attention in a way which has not been necessary in the past years of our history.

We have found ourselves in a situation where our involvement with the countries of Asia, our political involvement and our economic assistance, has necessarily had to grow because we are contiguous to, and in a sense a part of this region, and what happens there will ultimately and inevitably affect us.

We have also found ourselves in a situation where the markets overseas for our rural products, which had fluctuated in the past, but had been taken for granted as markets in which we could profitably sell for most of the time, are now threatened by a possible entry of the United Kingdom into the European Economic Community.

And we have found ourselves, too, in Australia in some strange new situation of politics. Because for the first time, we have many people in our community who challenge the verdict of the ballot box, who challenge the workings of democracy to elect a government, who urge that people should take to the streets if they are unhappy with what a government, democratically elected, does.

And we have an Opposition - an alternative government - supporting, to a great extent, those who are taking these new approaches to politics. And this must not be underrated. I know that our opponents pretend that they do not altogether support the overthrow of authority as has been urged by Dr Cairns, one of the front bench supporters of the Opposition. I know that they attempt hesitantly to disengage from those who wish to make the streets the arbiter of political decisions.

But I believe that anyone who looks at what they are doing must come to the conclusion that they are frightened to come out and condemn what ought to be condemned. It is all very well for the Premier of South Australia to dissociate himself from a moratorium movement which seeks to sit at city intersections; but having done that, he then seeks to instruct the head of his police not to prevent people sitting at city intersections. It is all very well for the Leader of the Opposition to make soothing noises as to what is going on, but just yesterday we saw him speaking to a crowd - an orderly crowd - but a crowd that had Vietcong flags flying above them, and above his head as he spoke to them.

And the people of this country, I believe, need, not as a political gimmick, but as something that goes to the very heart of politics, to make up their minds as to whether they believe the verdict of the ballot box should be accepted or whether they think it ought to be challenged in the streets. This is a great new issue between ourselves and our opponents. Let me develop it a little.

Some attempts have been made to suggest that we do not believe in a right of dissent - and this is completely and utterly untrue. I believe that we would be those who, harder than anybody else, would fight to retain the right of dissent, would fight to retain the right of criticism of a government, to fight to retain the right of those who disagree to express that disagreement in all reasonable forms. We do not object to - rather do we pledge ourselves to protect the right to dissent.

But equally do we believe that there are civil rights of a majority of Australians, that the majority of Australians have rights to use the streets if they wish to without being impeded, that they have the right to use public buildings, without having those buildings invaded and stink bombs let off as has happened in post offices throughout Australia.

We believe that there is a right and a need to protect the individual against intimidation by those who disagree with what the Government is doing - threats and intimidation. And perhaps if I can encapsulate it in this way, I would say this - we would agree with Voltaire completely when he said: "I disagree with what you say, but I would fight to the death for your right to say it". This is our credo too.

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But we would not go on, as those who would seek to take over the streets would go on, to change that statement to saying : "I disagree with what you do, but I will fight to the death for your right to do it" because there is no right to interfere with the civil rights of the majority of the Australian people. And this will be a matter engaging the attention of our Government very, very soon, and of the State Governments, I know.

Sir, there has been this year discussion on the question of the financial management of this country of Australia and of the Budget for the year in front of us, and I would like to say some words on that.

We approached the planning - the financial planning for this year - within certain fixed parameters. We had already decided, in conjunction with the Premiers, that there should be, as far as was economically responsible, greater sums of money available to State Governments than in the past, to enable them to tackle those problems of education, of health, of communications, the myriad problems with which they are initially concerned. And so, at the Premiers' Conference, we had made a new deal which greatly increased the amount of finance available to State Governments this year and for the ensuing years over what would have been available had the old system and the old agreement prevailed - some 12 per cent increase in the amounts available for expenditure. And this was one parameter which we had to regard as we approached our planning for this year.

Secondly, we had a need, an obvious need, to ensure, as far as we could ensure, that the rate of inflation was slowed, and not allowed to continue in the way in which it continued in the last quarter of last financial year. Up until the last quarter of the last financial year, the rate had been not unreasonable - 3 per cent or 3 point something per cent - but in the last quarter it had gone to 5, over 5 per cent. This has got to be stopped. We had to ensure that it was stopped for if it were not, then the results would have been that increased wages were nothing but fool's gold, that those in the rural industries in Australia would have been hit and unable to pass on the cost increases that they would have had to bear; that all those on fixed incomes - all superannuants, all pensioners, would have had this bleeding sore of inflation withdrawing from them their capacity to buy the things they needed to live. And this was another essential element we had to bear in mind.

Then, too, we had said - and I think properly said - that one of our objectives would be to reduce the rate of direct taxation on people throughout Australia. This, indeed, had been recommended to us as the most important thing to be done in the Budget by the Liberal Party organisations throughout Australia speaking through their Federal delegates coming to Canberra. And this, too, we felt we ought to do, and I felt I ought to do because I had promised to do it. And this was another necessity we had to meet.

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And so in the result we did this. We increased **indirect** taxation - and this has caused some criticism - but after all, in all other **countries** of the world that I know of, **significant countries, civilised countries - economically speaking -** there has been a swing from direct to indirect taxation. And surely that swing must be in line with general **liberal thinking**, because there is no need for a person to buy more cigarettes unless he makes a choice to do it, or to drink more wine unless he makes a choice to do it, or to use more petrol unless he makes a choice to do so. What we have done is to reduce the direct tax on the individual and if he then chooses to buy things which are not essential, that is his choice and we, as Liberals, have always stood for the right of choice. If he doesn't do that, he has more opportunity to save, or more opportunity to buy the necessities for his family.

I believe that by the end of this financial year, this Budget will have been seen to be one of the great Budgets of Australia, provided that that which we have done to contain inflation is not damaged by organisations we do not control, increasing wages throughout Australia without paying regard to the productivity increase which alone can thoroughly justify an increase in wages and make an increase in wages really valid and really essential.

May I in conclusion before we reach this question time, deal with two other subjects - and forgive me if I may seem self-centred in this, but I would like to refresh your memory of some of the things which have been done in the last two and three quarter years, because a great deal in fact has been done.

We have brought in a new oil pricing policy as a result of the discovery of oil in Bass Strait, subject to great criticism at the time, but which now is admitted to be working out to the benefit of the Australian consumer in that the price arranged for Australian oil is now less than would be required to import oil, and to the benefit of those seeking for oil throughout Australia, for we must find more.

We have taken steps - again subject to criticism at first at the times they were taken - to preserve as much as possible for Australians the equity in the new developments and the new mineral discoveries taking place throughout Australia. We have not sought to legislate for this in any way because if we did - if we sought to lay down a distinct policy on it, it would be inflexible and it would be inapplicable to an area where there are so many problems and so many different circumstances. But we have let it be known abroad, that as a government we wish to see that Australians are offered equity participation in the development of this country and this has had a significant and measurable effect on the offerings that have been made to Australia. We have laid down the guidelines in which overseas companies can borrow in Australia so that there is more incentive to give equity to Australians, because the more equity that is given to Australians the more borrowing is allowed inside Australia. We have brought in convertible notes and we have, on a couple of occasions - you will remember one just last week - protected where we thought it was in the national interest to protect Australian companies.

~~We have increased~~ social services in this country to a degree to which they have never been increased over a comparable time as much as we have done. This tends to be obscured because in this last Budget there was just a 'hold the line' pension increase, but if you go back to 1968 and if you see the rise in the pensions since that time and compare it with the rise in the cost of living, you will see that in that period of time the actual benefits to pensioners of all kinds has very greatly increased indeed. And there is much more to be done, I know, but let us as Liberals not think that we have dropped behind when in fact we have, in real terms, increased these benefits.

We have taken away the fear of long-term illness in hospitals. We still have to deal with the problem of long-term illness in nursing homes. We still have things to do to help low income families with many children. This was part of our policy at the last election. This will be carried out during our period of government. This I am sure you would, as Liberals, wish to see us carry out and indeed we will.

Sir, I have in fact here about six pages of the things that we have done. I won't read them out for it would take too long. But were it not for this Government, I do not believe there would be a chance for the development of an aluminium industry in Queensland, which could be the greatest development that that State has known in the North of Brisbane; if it were not for this Government, there would be no Institute of Marine Science which could make Australia the outstanding country in the world in relation to marine biology; if it were not for this Government, there would be no scheme for the provision of libraries in all secondary schools. I will stop. But there are many things I think we can be pleased about and you can too

For the future, we will carry out the programme that we put before you. I do not think we have broken one promise yet and I can assure you that before the term of this Government is finished, every promise made at the last election will be fulfilled.

But these are finite things, these are definite things. What is even more important than that for us is to bear this in mind. At the beginning of my talk to you I said what we stood for twenty years ago and what we stand for now, what we were against twenty years ago and what we are against now. And I do ask you to study our opponents because they have not changed one whit from the policies they held twenty years ago. They still believe in nationalisation and it is still in their platform. They are still swayed by unions affiliated through their conferences, many of them communist dominated unions. They would still destroy our foreign and our defence policy. They would still seek to interfere in the lives of every single Australian in this country.

There has not been one single bit of constructive criticism put forward since we have been in government. Wide statements about the need, the very definite need for better cities, statements about the need for more adequate sewerage, statements about anything which is going to require large sums of money to implement, and of course the needs are there because no country is perfect. But there has been no indication of how these would be carried or of what burdens would be laid upon Australians to try and carry them out, burdens in the form of increased taxes or inflation or control by bureaucrats from Canberra. Their objectives are still the same, their controllers are still the same. If they come into government, the results of what they would do would be the same as those results which led them to be thrown out of government twenty odd years ago.

There is no alteration there. There is a great attempt to pretend there is an alteration, to pretend that the nationalisation programme has been dropped, to pretend that they are not influenced still by outside bodies and by extreme left-wing bodies. Look at their actions in the moratorium and I believe you would agree with me that what they are pretending to be is not what they are. They are seeking to hide their weapons. They are trying to pretend they are not controlled from the areas from which they are controlled and trying to come before the Australian people in disguise. It is up to us to strip that disguise and it is up to us to go forward so that in the next twenty-one years as much progress can be made as has been made in the last twenty-one. Indeed, more, because the opportunities are there as the result of the last twenty-one. And I think that Liberal Parties throughout Australia will see that this is done and I know that if they see that this is done they will be rendering a signal service to their nation.

Q. Mr Prime Minister do you think that a rather over-zealous law and order campaign along American models could lose more votes than it could gain, particularly amongst young people? And if so, what steps would you be thinking of taking in this direction?

PM I don't know what you mean by "an over-zealous American-type campaign on law and order". I don't therefore know whether that would lose more votes than it would gain. But as I said in the main body of my address, I believe that the civil rights of Australians, the majority of Australians, must be protected against disruption from a minority. And I don't believe that we can or should continue to allow people to invade Commonwealth Government offices, to intimidate people working in those offices, to pour ox blood over records in those offices, to enter Commonwealth Ministers' rooms and lock them in the rooms and sit around and insult them. I don't believe we should allow people to enter into such buildings as we control such as post offices and interfere with the rights of citizens using those post offices. These things need to be stopped. Certainly they need to be stopped by due process of law. I believe that the penalties that should be applied in these instances should be such as to prevent people from continuing to do them. Now whether that would lose more votes than it would gain, I couldn't say. I believe

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that it would gain more votes than it would lose but, more importantly than that, I believe it to be the right and proper thing to do and the proper way to govern a country to see that this was not allowed to continue to happen. Because I think that all history shows that once a group takes to the streets to try and impose their will which they can't impose through the sources open to them, then groups which oppose that group will take to the streets too, to battle them and the streets will become a battleground and this is not the way in which a democracy or a country ought to be run when there is a free vote available every so often to elect a government and to decide these questions, and that's my answer.
