

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



PRIME MINISTER

LIBERAL PARTY DINNER

HOLT ELECTORATE. Vic.

19 May 1972

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon.

William McMahon, CH,MP.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To start with I think you would like me to thank Mr and Mrs Bill Montague for providing us with the opportunity to be here. It is a real gathering of the clans .

We are here not only to meet and have a happy time; we are here to help in every way we can to ensure that LEN REID, is going to come back into the Government at the next election with the thumping majority he deserves. This function is a tribute to him. It is a tribute to the Liberals in the Division of Holt who have helped make it a success.

Holt is rather unique and unusual. In a minute I will tell you why it has a rather unique and unusual member in Len Reid. This electoral division was named after a man who was an outstanding Australian, an outstanding Victorian, and an outstanding Liberal Prime Minister. I refer of course to the Late Harold Holt.

I'm told this division is in fact one of the fastest growing electorate in Australia, after Mitchell, on the Western outskirts of Sydney and Diamond Valley, which covers the growing North-eastern suburban fringe of Melbourne. The point about these three electorates is that they are all in rapidly developing new suburban areas, and they are all held by Liberals.

Electorates like this are truly a part of the suburban explosion that has been going on around the edges of our great cities for some years now. Many of the people who are moving into these areas are young couples with young families, who are establishing their first home. They have particular needs in housing, in health, in education, in roads, in power, sewerage and in other community facilities of many kinds.

So you find two characteristics peculiar to these new areas - growth and youth - which pose special problems to be solved, and these need special remedies and solutions. The effort to meet the problems of community development is one for all of us at all levels of government - at the local government level - and I believe it is fundamental to persevere and co-operate with local government.

This afternoon, on the way here, I attended a civic reception at Springvale in this electorate. Springvale is one of the fastest growing districts in Victoria, or in Australia for that matter, and it is, I would say, a good example of the growth explosion I have referred to.

The second level of government involved is of course, the State government with its multitude of specific responsibilities. The third link in the chain is, of course, my own government in Canberra. Now the problems and needs of this rapid urban growth range across the three levels of government and in some places they inevitably overlap. But it should be remembered that these are problems which are generated by growth and progress themselves. They occur against a backdrop of a developing, diversifying and continuously expanding national economy. They are problems which will not be swept away by fine phrases or fulsome promises in election year. They will only be overcome by patient and intelligent co-operation between all of the three tiers of our Australian system of government.

Our opponents think it is fashionable these days to claim we have a "crisis" in our cities similar to those in some comparable cities overseas. That, of course, is wildly inaccurate. Nevertheless we in the Commonwealth Government know you are concerned, and rightly so. We know you want action now - to improve today's living conditions and to avoid the greater problems of tomorrow. No one can pretend that the cities do not have problems such as high land costs, atmospheric pollution, traffic congestion, long distance commuting, recreational congestion, lack of community centres in the outer suburbs, and an increased crime rate, violence and other social problems.

Basically, these are tasks for the two tiers of our government structure which are closest to them, and they are the local and state governments. But this does not by any means indicate that we in Canberra do not have a very strong indirect interest, nor does it mean we are not sympathetic. Let me explain.

We in Canberra see one of our vitally important duties as the management of the national economy. Success in national economic areas is fundamental to the growth which the suburban explosion implies. It is fundamental that the national economy be kept healthy and continuously expanding. I hope I say this modestly.

I have had a good deal of direct experience in financial and economic management as Treasurer and now in my present portfolio. On that score I think that we can fairly claim that our own flexible and sensitive approach to the difficult economic problems we have been confronted with, and our willingness to act boldly and without delay to take positive decisions in stimulating the economy are now paying off in the return of business confidence, and the continuing improvement in the employment situation.

Only on Tuesday, my colleague, the Minister for Labour and National Service, announced the April figures for employment. They showed unemployment was down by nearly another 5,000 to about 93,400. This was a far cry from the anguished cries and the fear predictions of the Leader of the Opposition and his Lieutenants. It is no thanks to him, or his industrial spokesman, Mr. Clyde Cameron, or to Mr. Hawke for that matter. They saw unemployment as a fear issue, as something to be exploited. The more unemployed, the more votes.

Well, that one has blown up in their faces. So have others where they have sought to pull the wool over the eyes of the electorate. Remember the "reform" -- and I have that word in inverted commas -- of the Victorian Labor Party? That exploded when the "reformed" Victorian Labor Party broke out in cheers for the North Vietnamese aggression against South Vietnam. The support of the Labor movement for demonstrators and even violence, has grown in strength. That blew up as well.

I am glad to hear that some Labor politicians are now adding their voices to the call to observe the law in the streets, even if it is belated. I look forward to them extending their call to observe the law on draft dodging as well.

But to return to my main theme here tonight on the question of urban development: The second area of our involvement -- this is interconnected with our overall role of economic management -- is in our continually increasing financial allocations to the states. Before people become too carried away with labels like urbanisation, or urban affairs, or phrases like the challenge of the cities, they should stop to consider the billions of dollars for housing, for roads, for water, for sewerage, for hospitals, and for many, many other facilities that have resulted from the long years of practical co-operation between Commonwealth and State Governments under Liberal and Country Party Governments.

For the current financial year, the states works and housing allocation alone is \$92 million dollars. It is left to state Governments to decide how they spend these allocations and most other capital and revenue assistance from us. We believe it is right that they should have this right. They are closer to these problems than we are. They have the administrative experience.

Lastly there are the ways in which the Commonwealth directly assists in coping with the special needs and problems of the new urban areas. Health and education are two areas where we have made specific decisions within the past few days and weeks. Example -- the most common fee has been increased in Victoria and accepted by doctors here without further cost to fund contributors. We have in education moved directly and for the first time into providing money to build school classrooms. Previously, we were helping with science blocks and libraries. Now we will be building the schools themselves, for both government and independent schools for all Australian children in all Australian schools.

We will also shortly be making an important policy statement on the Commonwealth's approach to environmental questions, and of course, there is the other large area of direct commonwealth assistance. That is social welfare. This is an area in which Led Reid has shown himself to be a man of great compassion and determination in both a national and international sense. His concern knows no borders and no limitations. That is why he was such a strong advocate of our help for Bangladesh.

Like him, I am proud that Australia was one of the first to go to the aid of Bangladesh and one of the first to recognise that new nation and new member of the Commonwealth. On the home scene he has been a determined advocate of certain important reforms in our pensions and social welfare structure.

Well Mr. Chairman, I do not want to interrupt the proceedings and further. But I did want to indicate to you and those who are here this evening how we in Canberra and we in the Liberal Party are thinking on these problems: How we are prepared to help co-operatively and constructively in urban development; and how we do not favour an impractical and unworkable system of long-range bureaucracy to deal with essentially local problems such as that favoured by the Labor Party.
