



PRIME MINISTER

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MORAL ISSUES IN THE ELECTION

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon.
William McMahon, C.H., M.P.

During the election campaign questions have been asked about the attitude of the principal parties on some of the moral issues of the day. There are fundamental differences between the Government and the Labor Party on a number of them.

What stand should a Government take on such issues? Let me state my belief - a belief which is implicit in our policies.

In a free society it is customary to regard the private morals of an individual as a matter for his own conscience. However, when such moral actions impinge upon others and are likely to have adverse social effects, particularly if they are likely to corrupt the young, then it is the duty of Governments in democratic countries to intervene to protect the rights of others. With this principle, I fully agree.

Abortion is a case in point. It is clear, of course, that under certain conditions there is justification for therapeutic abortion. The law should and does provide for this.

But my Government does not believe in abortion on demand. I confirm the statements I have made before that we will not amend the law relating to abortion.

My Government would apply the same principles to drugs, whether "soft" or hard drugs. While we recognise that drug addicts need and should get first-class medical attention, we would not, as some Labor Party members urge, remove the penalties for drug-taking, including marihuana.

Medical science cannot exonerate marihuana from serious physiological and psychological effects, including possible genetic damage. In such circumstances, to give de facto legality to it by removing penalties would be reckless irresponsibility.

Similarly, a Government has a responsibility to the community on censorship, particularly in the protection of the young. A Government should not be heavy handed or paternalistic. It should try to reflect the ethical standards and voluntary restraints of the community. This, we try to do.

We reject the argument by some Labor members that all censorship should be removed, except on cinema advertising. In our view, the Australian people expect us to act on hard-core pornography and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Whitlam has stated his views on abortion and his intentions towards influencing his Party's policy on this matter.

On 24 June 1971 he said: "I believe that if a woman does not want to bear a child, she should not have to. I believe in abortion upon request."

Commenting on the 1971 Federal Conference of the ALP, the official organ of the Queensland Branch of the ALP, "Trend", reports in its issue of July 1971: "Gough Whitlam made it quite clear that he favoured abortion on request, would campaign for it and support any bill aimed at achieving this object."

We reject such an attitude. Clearly this is an issue at this election because it involves Commonwealth criminal laws which will be under review in the new Parliament. What the Commonwealth does in the A.C.T. could set an Australian standard.

My Government does not intend to alter the existing abortion laws which provide for therapeutic emergencies but also protect against the unnecessary destruction of life.

CANBERRA

26 November 1972