

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. William McMahon

C.H., M.P.

Mr. President, Members of the National Press Club and Ladies and Gentlemen of the National Press:

One of the perennial questions in a democracy like ours is the one about the Press and politics.

Does the Press have the power to radically influence the political process?

Can the Press actually change a Government or alter an election result?

And as a politician, I am asked with some regularity what a Government ought to do about it.

Well, I'll give you one commitment and one non-election promise.

I am committed to a free Press as an essential element of a democracy and I would always want to preserve it.

And I make the non-promise. We will not establish a Ministry for the media.

I noticed that a distinguished British Journalist said the other day that newspapers who claimed they could win an election were being fanciful.

I'm not sure how closely this translates to the Australian situation, but I will say this to you:

That all the praise and the blame,  
agreements and disagreements,  
and conflicts of opinion between politicians  
and the Press eventually finish up at one point.  
and we will reach that point on Saturday  
when all the newspaper readers,  
television viewers  
and radio listeners  
turn themselves into voters and make the final  
decision for themselves.

That's the only way to settle the argument.

And I think for once we all have to agree that it's the correct and proper method.

Having said that, I come to my main purpose in accepting your invitation today -

And that is to review this election campaign and the major issues that are before the Australian people today.

If I could summarise them briefly in the form of a list but not necessarily in order of importance, they are

First of all  
representative Government.

Good Government rests on three basic principles:

It should be truly representative:  
There must be respect for the rule of law:  
And there must be an independent judiciary to protect the individual against the State.

As an elected representative, you are there for the people's purposes -

Not your own  
And you should reflect the ambitions and the vitality and the feelings of all Australians.

This goes hand in hand with my strong conviction that no single person or group of people should become dominant or too powerful in the community.

That is the road to dictatorship.

And here lies the fundamental and primary difference.

We stand for truly representative Government.  
We are there to reflect the will and the wishes of the people, and I believe we do.

The evidence of the years against Labor is overwhelming and irrefutable. Labor Members of Parliament are pledged to obey the instructions of the party machine.

This has been true for many years. It remains true, despite Mr. Whitlam's cosmetic efforts.

In fact, it may well be that a Labor Government in the nineteen-seventies would be more subject to outside non-elected direction than in the nineteen-forties.

It is certainly true that the influence of the left wing unions through Mr. Hawke and the A.C.T.U. executive is stronger.

So that remains a primary issue.

The second question is that of irresponsibility and inflation which has been made an issue by Mr. Whitlam's costly and incredible total of 140 policy promises.

Together with his delusions about what can be done with the growth rate.

Closely linked with this is the state of the economy and the management of the economy.

The latest indicators -

Industrial production,  
New motor vehicle registrations,  
And building approvals,

All confirm the diagnosis of an economy which is bubbling along and which by this time next year -

or possibly a few months earlier  
may well be in the condition of boom.

Clearly it is not appropriate in the coming months to unleash demand in the tremendous and irresponsible manner that Labor's huge list of promises implies.

Next, there is the very real question  
of why the Labor Party wants to run away from the  
issues of respect for the law.

And the preservation of accepted social values,  
now that the election is so close.

They are badly divided on this.

And that issue is very closely tied in with Labor's  
impotence and silence on industrial relations and the future of  
the arbitration system.

There is the question also of the party which puts  
itself up as an alternative Government consistently skating away  
from and trying to dodge the great issue of the defence and foreign  
policies of this nation.

And the issue of centralism versus federalism, which  
is an expression of one of the great and overriding philosophical  
gulfs between us and the socialists.

As well there is the question of campaign opportunism  
again made an issue by Labor's  
on-the-run attempts to produce last-minute vote-catchers  
and plug gaps which it seems even the 140 election  
promises did not cover.

Then there are the other great issues.

Is there to be freedom or enforced conformity and  
monolithic control of education in Australia?

Is freedom of choice  
and the whole private and religious hospital system  
to be destroyed in the name of a single, depersonalised and more  
expensive health machine?

Are our cities to be renewed and our new cities built according to the rules of the political game or should it be done by a properly constituted expert body advising both Federal and State Governments?

Those are some of the major issues.

But let me look at them in a little more detail.

The Labor Policy Speech (and his attempt at economics at Queanbeyan)

showed that Mr. Whitlam had dropped all pretence of responsibility and moderation in this attempt to buy his way into office

and bluff his way through the question of cost and the impact on the economy.

We have attempted to make sense out of this mess of ambiguity and half-baked proposals in order to get a fair and sensible estimate of costs to the taxpayer.

As you know, their figure was \$1,330 million against \$375 million for my Government's election proposals.

That is, four times the cost.

As you know, too, Labor's figure covered only a few of the firm proposals and have not been costed.

We had to leave out many of Labor's deceptive and vague proposals

simply because they were too sloppy for any disciplined and proper costing.

In total, they would most certainly run into many hundreds of millions more.

All this was wrapped up in pious talk about open Government.

Mr. Whitlam might well have started by being open about the exact nature of his proposals,

their timing,  
the specific priorities in implementing his myriad promises,

and, most importantly, how they are to be paid for.

He has been too clever by half in dodging the taxation question by saying there will be no change in taxation rates.

Every Australian knows that rising incomes and prices automatically cause a greater and greater burden of actual tax in dollars.

The serious inflationary consequences of the Labor programme such as the 35-hour week and reduction in immigration would accelerate the speed at which the burden becomes heavier and heavier, and the tax paid becomes punitive.

We have recognised this with two large tax cuts since the last election -

Nearly 10 percent in the 1970-71 Budget  
and an average of 10 percent in the Budget three months ago.

Mr. Whitlam hopes that no one will see through his lawyer's talk about tax rates rather than actual dollars paid in tax.

As a means of financing his white elephants through a two-way squeeze of inflation-boosted taxation.

This policy is not only dishonest to the taxpayer  
and inhuman in its effects  
on fixed income earners  
and social service beneficiaries

it is also inadequate  
to meet the huge costs involved.

Taxation rates themselves would have to go up,  
or it would have to be done through new or increased indirect taxes.

Remember, Labor would impose two new taxes immediately.  
The Health levy of 1.35% and the Social Services tax  
of 2.5%.

Or 3.85 cents in every dollar of your earnings.

We have reduced personal income taxation twice, as I have already mentioned.

As I said at the beginning of this campaign and I repeat now,

Under Labor either taxes will have to be increased,  
or many of Labor's promises would have to be quietly dropped as forgotten election gimmicks.

And Labor talks about trusting the people.  
While it deliberately perpetrates this slick and unworthy deceit.

In fact, Mr. Whitlam doesn't trust his own Shadow Treasurer who was candid enough to admit  
that anyone over the \$90 to \$95 a week level would pay more tax under Labor.

It is typically dishonest of him to try and get around this by talking about tax rates.

Most people are rightly concerned with just how much is going to be left in their pockets.

But the misery of  
unremitting taxation burdens  
chained to unchecked inflation  
is only one side of this type of mandrake economics  
we hear from the Leader of the Opposition.

You know what I mean.

Think of the growth rate - halve it - and then pretend you can multiply it by magic.

The other side of this story is simply the very structure of Government

which the history and geography of this nation has given us

- that is the three-tiered Federal system.

The whole thrust of the socialist takeover scheme is the concentration of all political power here in Canberra while State and Local Governments are to be strangled and emasculated.

There are a lot of wolves in sheep's clothing around the place on this subject.

Not least Mr. Whitlam himself.

But I put it to you that no one who has read the Labor Platform, the Labor Policy Speech, or Mr. Whitlam's many constitutional speeches could have any doubt about his Party's true intention.

To put it in the words of my friend, Bob Askin:  
"They want to murder the States"

The policy of the Liberal Party on this issue could not be more opposed to that of Labor.

We are convinced that power should not be sucked into the centre

but pushed out and down to the grass roots, close to the problems and close to the people.

This is a world trend, even in Mr. Whitlam's so-called "comparable countries."

So much for the Policy Speeches.

What have we seen since from our opponents?

Incredibly it appears that Mr. Whitlam was not satisfied with his 140 promises, once he saw our proposals.

Opportunism was piled on top of irresponsibility and we heard first that Labor would match our plans for \$330 million for city transport.

Since then, every time he arrives in a capital city he adds another titbit from a stolen report and at last count, was well past the \$700 million mark in extra transport promises.

On top of that, his Deputy suddenly discovered that Labor might also be able to afford an enlistment bonus for the army

although this appears to be still in the half-baked promise category.

Two more bribes from the Labor Party.

After that we have heard virtually nothing from Labor's sham campaign

but a few belated bleats about their half-hearted plans to quieten down organised Labor rowdies

who have been trying to drown out my own election meetings around the country.

The truth is that once the Labor Party had trotted out its T-shirt, TV commercials and its tremendous election bribes, it ran for cover, leaving it to Mr. Sayers to throw the mud.

With -plenty of financial support, of course.

So what then have we seen in this campaign?

Mr. Whitlam is scared of defence and foreign policy.

He refuses to discuss law and order.

He has been muzzled on industrial relations policy.

He won't talk about immigration.

He wants to wash his hands of moral issues.

So much for trusting the people

So much for leadership.

Let me speak to you now about this question of leadership.

I know many of you are experts in this area you write about it so much.

So you may want to know how I see it.

As I said at the start, I believe Government should be truly representative.

That is the first of the three ingredients of good Government.

The second is that we should respect the rule of law.

And the third is that we should have an independent judiciary that can be able to determine disputes between the individual and the State.

So I believe that a man should have those qualities of leadership which will make certain he can sensibly and satisfactorily interpret the will and the wishes of the people.

He should also be able to make the machinery of Government function in such a way that those wishes can be put into practice.

And the people themselves should be kept informed that he is carrying out their will in the way they want him to do.

He is also the man who can create the conditions under which the individual himself can realise his own ambitions (providing they don't interfere with the rights of others),

can satisfy his needs and his wants, can help his neighbours,  
and can help to develop the better society we all want.

It is also a fundamental task of leadership for the Government.  
to interpret the changes occurring in society as life becomes more complex  
to be able to adjust  
the Parliament  
and the law  
in order to mesh with the changing environment and changing values.

Now, I'd like to relate these thoughts to my own party  
to show how in a practical way we have been able to put these principles into practice.

I faced a difficult task when I took office twenty months ago, as most of you have recognised  
with no small emphasis in your reporting.

First of all, I had to make sure  
that the State Premiers were treated as men  
with their own serious responsibilities of Government in their own areas.

The results have been worthwhile.

The relations between the Commonwealth and the States are much better  
and they have been able to play a much more effective part in getting this good society that we all seek to achieve.

Then we had the problem  
of unemployment getting too high  
and demand for goods and services falling.

We had the problems of falling prices for rural commodities and the exchange rate  
and the alarming rise in wages and average earnings  
and industrial lawlessness.

So we deliberately set out to boost demand  
to get production and employment rising  
and to improve the climate of expectations  
so that economic conditions would be improved.

Part of this was to ensure that people would have the opportunity to earn more money  
and keep a greater amount of it in their own pockets.

After all, this is the incentive to do better remembering always that there are national and social needs which the Government must take into account  
at the same time as it looks at the tax burden on the individual.

So as I have said, we twice reduced taxation substantially to meet this objective.

Looking at this problem in the much wider national sense

You will remember that we acted with a series of measures

The Premiers' Conferences  
with the mini-Budget  
the Budget  
and then on to our Policy Speech

In all of these, you will see that our objective has been to represent the individual men and women in our society.

And we wanted to give priority to those in the greatest need.

I believe any honest witness will agree that we have achieved our purpose.

But once having satisfied those basic or conventional needs

we believe there's much more the Government should, and must do.

That is, to promote the arts  
to provide opportunities for recreation  
opportunities for travel  
opportunities to ensure that if man is the paramount objective of social life,  
that he is able to realise inherited qualities  
to burgeon and to grow  
and to ensure that as he burgeons and grows  
he will be able to help his own family  
his neighbours  
and to more helpfully participate in the social life of the community.

In my view, this is the true objective of Government  
I don't believe in dictatorship.  
I do believe in leadership.

I hope that I have made some contribution to achieving the true liberal ideal  
of ensuring that the person himself  
the individual man, woman or child  
can have a much better life, a much happier one,  
and that his prospects for the future in the wider sense can be fully realised.

We have come a long way along this road in twenty months.

Notwithstanding both the economic and political conditions which were very much less than ideal.

The economy is now in good shape and obviously getting better.

The quality of social justice has been greatly improved.

And I have a young, able and dedicated team of Ministers with me.

I think Australians recognise that what we have done has been sound and practical and progressive as well.

I think they recognise  
that we are moving into better times  
and a greater future  
a future in which good Government  
means that it is the Government's job to do its  
best to meet the will and wishes of the people as individuals.

I am therefore convinced that when it comes to the  
decision on Saturday  
they will accept us  
and reject the alternative of a Government which  
wants to impose its will and its machinery and its theories  
on the people themselves.

Thank you.

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