



PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 26

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REPORT TO THE NATION

Good evening. Just over two weeks ago the people of Australia gave the Australian Labor Party a clear mandate to put into effect the policies which I had set forth on behalf of the party during the campaign. The uncertainties and complexities of the Australian electoral system are such that it was not possible until this week to assemble the parliamentary party and elect the full ministry. But I believed it was essential that the new Government should waste no time in implementing its program, and therefore I formed an interim ministry with my Deputy, Mr. Barnard. A great many decisions were made, but I am anxious that it should not be thought that any of them were hasty or ill-considered. Every decision was a clear expression of the program on which we were elected, an expression of our unmistakable mandate. The question was simply whether there was any good reason for delaying action, in obedience to the people's will. I could find no good reason.

The most important of our initiatives have been taken in the field of our relations with our neighbours, our friends and our allies, and in this area it was particularly urgent that any doubt or confusion about the intentions of the new Government should be set at rest immediately. Now we have a ministry. I am delighted with the choice my colleagues have made. I am honoured and proud to be the Leader of this team. The leader not just of the ministry but of the many excellent men who have not been chosen but who will render great service to our nation as members of the Government.

In the past two weeks I have been vastly encouraged by the help and co-operation given to us by all sections of the public service. It speaks volumes for the strength of Australia's democratic system that the loyalty and integrity of the public service can be transferred without question or qualification to a newly elected Government after 23 years of equal fidelity to another Government. And in this context I take the opportunity to congratulate Mr. Snedden the new Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Opposition. None knows better than I the burdens and - can one say - the frustrations of that high office. And none appreciates more than its crucial importance to the proper working of our democracy.

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Now the real work of Government begins. I believe exciting months and years are ahead for all of us. Abroad I believe we are already forging a new style and image for Australia - nothing raucous or rash or abrasive - but Australia is speaking with a firm, clear and independent voice and I believe we are being heard with a new respect. At home we have already begun the restructuring, reinvigoration and modernisation of administration to equip Australia - this great urban nation - to meet the problems we face in the last quarter of the twentieth century. And let's not under-estimate the problems, the immediate ones, the long term ones. In particular, my Government will spare no effort to restore genuine full employment in this country. Yet we must do this while continuing a battle to contain inflation. We are under no illusions about the difficulty of this double task.

One of the worst aspects of inflation is that it is socially disruptive. It creates tremendous pressures for new wage and salary demands. Inevitably whole sections of the community - people such as the retired, who are dependent on Governments for their income, and those on fixed incomes - struggle behind in the race. And it is these social aspects of inflation - the things that would weaken unity and mutual goodwill among our citizens - that, for the Australian Labor Party, give added urgency to the problem. For we do want the great theme of our Government to be the restoration of national unity, the ending of the weakening divisions whereby employees have been set against employers, the young against the mature, the parents and teachers of pupils at government schools against those at non-government schools. It was this determination, as much as anything else, that gives us pride in the fact that the first great decision of our Government was to end conscription, for perhaps its very worst feature was the way it created needless and harmful divisions in our community. And for the same reason it has given me tremendous satisfaction that history will show that our first major appointments were the highly qualified men and women who have agreed to give their time and talents to the work of the Interim Schools Committee. This committee has already set about with great enthusiasm its appointed task of ensuring that every Australian child who embarks upon secondary education next year will leave school with an equal start in life. I believe that the futile debate on State aid and State rights in education, which has divided our society for a century, is now ended.

I last spoke to you directly on the eve of the elections. I then said that I would seek and need the help of all sections of the Australian people in the task of leading this great nation. Everything I have seen and learnt in the past two weeks confirms that need. Together we can achieve great and good things for Australia.

May I wish you and your families a very happy Christmas and assure you that my Government will do its very best to ensure that we all have a prosperous New Year.

CANBERRA. A.C.T.