

SUNDAY, 25 MARCH 1973

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER,

THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, TO

THE VICTORIAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ALP, ST. KILDA TOWN HALL

This is the first General Assembly of the Victorian Branch since the House of Representatives elections. It's the first time I've spoken in this St. Kilda Town Hall since the great rally winding up the campaign for those elections. That meeting, the biggest and most enthusiastic political meeting I've ever attended is now part of Australian history. Among other things, that meeting symbolised the coming together of all the elements which now make Victoria a truly great branch of the Australian Labor Party. We won the elections federally because we won in Victoria and particularly in the capital of Victoria and we won in Victoria because the people of Victoria believed that the reconstruction in 1970 was a genuine remaking and remoulding of the Branch. That belief was not misplaced. I'm told by the Press that there's to be a confrontation today. The only confrontation that my Government is involved in in Victoria is not in the St. Kilda Town Hall but further up St. Kilda Road.

In this room are represented all viewpoints of the Party - any member of the Party who wanted to attend can come here today. Your time and efforts created the first Labor Government federally for 23 years. It's with your help that I'm now Prime Minister of Australia. I come here to co-operate - not to confront you. I come here to thank you - not to challenge you. You can all be proud of what you have done to create it. The Australian Government is your Government. You helped to make it. I come to thank you and to work with you.

I think it's now quite clear what a Labor Government is all about and I think that the work of this Government has helped make clear what the reconstruction was all about. The point at issue in the years before 1970 was whether the aims of our Party could be achieved through Parliament and whether a change in the Government party would mean a real change in the direction of Australian society. The reconstruction was carried through in the belief that a party which wished to win the support of half the people of Australia should itself be representative of the views of at least half the people of Australia. We believed that such a party would be able to use Parliament and the Parliamentary system to affect great and real changes in the nation. We offered a chance to change. The people took up our offer. We are making the most of the opportunity they gave us. We have to acknowledge that significant sections of our people had come to despair of the Parliamentary system. If we hadn't won on 2 December the effective survival of the system wouldn't have been able to get much of an insurance policy.

I believe that what we've done in the last three months and even more what we are going to do in the next three years and the next three Parliaments, not only restores Parliament to its proper role as the effective instrument for economic, social and political change, but will prove that, if used properly, Parliament is the real instrument - the only instrument for achieving democratic socialism in our time.

Make no mistake about what we've been doing for the last three months. The Governor-General himself said in his speech opening the Parliament, our program is designed to achieve basic changes in the administration and structure of Australian society in the lifetime of this Parliament. We are well on the way towards achieving this. We are determined to affect our reforms in such a way that our reactionary opponents will not be able to dismantle what we have created should they ever again be given the opportunity.

And let me say this in passing about our opponents: take no comfort at all in the fact that Mr Snedden or Mr Lynch - eminent Victorians as they may be - have proved so ineffective. The real result of their default is that the dominant voice on the right is the voice of reaction. The Liberal Party is moving under the control of men who speak the doctrine of fear and hatred. The voice of the Liberal Parliament which you now hear - the Liberal Party which you now hear in the Federal Parliament and outside is the echo of the early fifties. These men haven't been chastened by defeat. They have merely been further embittered by it. That is, they are a party bent not on reform but on revenge, and it's our job to see that they never get that opportunity.

It will be our fault if they get that chance to take revenge - to put the clock back, to dismantle the new structure. I think it's fair to say that no government in Australia's history has moved so rapidly and successfully to implement the program for which it was elected. I have to confess that when we were compiling the policy speech we anticipated that it would take much longer to achieve substantial retention of our promises. Yet setting aside for the moment the great continuing matters - the matters on which it will never be possible to say we've done enough - things like schools or hospitals or cities - setting them aside, we've already implemented or set in train 70 per cent of the specific promises in our policy speech. The real meaning of this, the significance of our Party's future and Australia's future is that by acting so competently we are freeing ourselves - we are preparing ourselves to take the political debate in Australia to a new and yet even higher level. We will be able to do this much sooner than we expected in December. In 1975 we'll not just be standing on our record, though that record will, I believe, be a very proud one. We'll be seeking the people's support for a new program, a new mandate on new issues that will take this nation to a new and higher level of progress and government.

It amazes me that people at home - even some people abroad - have expressed surprise at the speed with which we moved. Did anyone believe that we wouldn't do what we've been saying we'd do for years and years. I'd suppose it's really an illustration of how our opponents in their 23 years debauched the standards of Parliamentary politics and the standing of politicians. People had ceased to believe that politicians could be trusted to keep their word. I remember before the campaign that the draft resisters gave us only grudging support. They gave it to us not on the grounds that we were committed to the abolition of conscription but on the grounds that we might be more susceptible to pressure than our opponents. The first act of my first Government - the duumvirate - with Barnard and Hasluck. The first act was to end the draft, to end national service prosecutions, to free everybody imprisoned under the Act. Should anybody have been surprised. We promised to do it. It was something we could do by administrative action and we did it in the very first week. Should anybody have been surprised that we immediately withdrew the vestigial military force, the advisers which had been left in Vietnam, that we cut off all military aid to South Vietnam. Admittedly that took longer. It took place in the second week. But we promised to do it. It could be done by administrative action and we did it. Could anybody have been surprised that, in the third week, before Christmas, we had secured the recognition of the People's Republic of China and the exchange of diplomatic representatives with them. We promised to do it. It took over two weeks to do that. We had to negotiate with another country, but we did it. We successfully negotiated with them.

Could anybody have been surprised that when America resumed the bombing of Hanoi, we protested. We did immediately. Should anybody have been surprised that when the ceasefire took place we immediately set in train and in a week secured the recognition and exchange of diplomatic representatives with North Vietnam? Now all these things, ladies and gentlemen, were things which could be done by administrative action or by negotiation with other countries. We did them all. Nobody could have done them more effectively, more promptly. All these things werethings for which we sought a mandate, for which we secured a mandate, on which we discharged the mandate. Now I suppose this is an appropriate point for me to bring in some other matters of Foreign Affairs. You might have read about them. I noticed in the agenda, that it is supposed that we say that we should get rid of all U.S. bases from Australia. We will carry out the mandate for which we were elected, for which we sought the mandate.

And you will remember that the general context of a great number of suggestions are made that we are wanting to break the alliance with the U.S., that we are wanting to get out of ANZUS, and anything that anybody in the Party says which might have that effect is certain to have the maximum publicity. But that's not what the Platform says. It's not what the policy said. It's not what the mandate sought. Because what the Platform says is: the Labor Party seeks close continuing co-operation with the people of the United States and New Zealand to make the ANZUS Treaty an instrument for justice and peace and political, social and economic advancement in the Pacific area. And in the policy speech

as in every other respect I've followed it word for word: the close and continuing co-operation with the people of the United States and New Zealand to make it an instrument for justice and peace and for political, social and economic advancement in the Pacific. That's what the policy speech said. It's what it had to say because it was in the Platform, and that's what we want to make ANZUS. We want to make it what the Platform says it should be. We want to make it what the policy speech repeated that it should be. We want to make it what we sought a mandate to achieve. We want to make it what we were given a mandate to achieve.

Now let me point out that there are five bases - facilities (that's a more appropriate term in most cases) - which have some defence significance which the U.S. has arranged to have here. With two of them there has been a great deal of mystery for a long, long time. One has been at Alice Springs. It was to look at disturbances in the atmosphere and attendant phenomena. We revealed to the people and the Parliament that it was to detect nuclear explosions in the atmosphere. It's because it's able to do that that the U.S. felt confident to enter into the treaty with the Soviet Union and Britain to ban nuclear explosions in the atmosphere - the treaty which China and France will not sign. The other one was at Amberley Air Force Base near Ipswich and it was to disturb tremors in the underground and of course to distinguish earthquakes from nuclear explosions underground. We are able to reveal that that's what it did and it's because it's able to do that that the United States is confidently working towards a comprehensive nuclear treaty to ban it all. Now, nobody now would say that these were not valuable. They were valuable. We ought to be supporting it. And we have promptly ratified every nuclear treaty which has ever been made. Our opponents had to drag the chain. We had the conflict. But about those two things, nobody could learn. They now know what they were for, and nobody would object to them. They've helped to remove the spectre of nuclear war from the face of the earth and they could be effectively done from our part of the hemisphere.

Now the next two things are secret. One is at Pine Gap near Alice Springs, one is at Nurunga near Woomera. I emphasise that they are not part of weapons systems. They can not be used to make war on any country, and the Ministers whose job it is - Foreign Affairs, Defence, Barnard, myself, Willesee and Bishop - all have verified that fact. We know what goes on there. It's not our secret. One goes till 1976, one goes till 1979. They are expressed in the ANZUS context. I repeat they are not part of weapons systems. They can not be used to make war on any country. We can not disclose any more about their purposes because they're not our secrets. But ladies and gentlemen, what we want to recognise is this: that if we seek to govern this country, the people are entitled to believe that we will do it responsibly.

We never told the people at the elections that we would disclose other countries' secrets if we knew them. We never told the people that we'd break agreements that went into 1976 or 1979 and we knew this. These were public documents. Anybody can get copies of the Treaty.

Now you can't now say to people that you'll break them. We didn't seek a mandate on that. But I urge you if you want to know more about these, read what Barnard has said after the discussion in Cabinet and Caucus. Don't go on subsequent glosses about it. Read what was said. What the Cabinet and Caucus heard.

Then there's a final one, and that's the North West Cape. Because Australia and the United States entered into correspondence which said that the Australian Government had no right to know the messages that went through, we don't know. We are determined to find out. The agreement goes to 1988. But Barnard has said on behalf of the Cabinet and the Caucus in the Parliament that he will make it this year we would be negotiating that. We would never have kept the silly secrecy that there was about the original thing in Alice Springs - the nuclear atmospheric one, or the silly secrecy about the Amberley one - the nuclear underground. You now know. I can assure you that when in due course it's regarded as proper to release the information as to what is done at Pine Gap and Nurunga, you will find it just as acceptable as you now find what's been done at the old one at Alice Springs or at Amberley. Then you say that helps to see that the great powers don't have this ignorance of suspicion of each other which leads to wars. Because the wars that have taken place this century have been due to the ignorance of rival powers upon each other's doing. It's been due to the over-reaction of what great powers have committed themselves to in ignorance and suspicion of their rivals. These ones there will allay the suspicion and remove the ignorance.

The North West Cape is unsatisfactory. No self-respecting Government should ever have entered into it. No Government in the world would now enter into such an arrangement. And it's only fair to give us the opportunity when the Parliament gets up to negotiate with the Americans to do a proper contemporary thing. But believe me, we are determined to see in the terms of the Party Platform that Australia will not be party into undertaking or entering upon a war without knowing what it's all about and how it's being done.

We have said through the conferences in the past that members of Parliament in Australia should have just as much right to see these things as United States congressmen and that has already been conceded - it has been agreed - there's no difficulty about that. We achieved that promptly by putting our cards on the table and it was seen to be reasonable. Now don't blame the yanks for everything you don't like in this country. It's not their fault that so many of our companies and cattle stations are being bought overseas by them. It's the fault of our predecessors. Don't blame the Republicans and the Democrats for what the Liberals did.

Now I'll hurry on to some of the other things here. If things are capable of being done by Federal administrative action we've already acted because already there's been a very great deal done to transform the social security systems of Australia. We already, before Christmas, set up the Interim Schools Commission which will make its report before the end of May which will, we expect, be put into force in the coming budget and which, with the co-operation of the States, to which we've written, will mean that the Commonwealth can take over in the terms of the Party Platform, in the terms of the policy speech, in the terms of Sir Paul's opening address to the Parliament, will enable the Commonwealth to assume the responsibility for planning and financing tertiary education in Australia on the condition that the money so saved is spent on other forms of education. It can all be done this year. As far as we are concerned the report from the Committee which I set up when I was Minister for Education in the thirteen days before Christmas will be received before the end of May, and with the co-operation of the States it will all be fully implemented in the next scholastic year.

Some of these things involve legislation. It takes a bit longer to get legislation but we are resolved to see that our legislation will be in the terms of the mandate we sought and which we got. Then the remaining thing is of course the things which have to be done by co-operation with the States. Things where the Commonwealth can't do it single-handed. Admittedly, where international affairs are concerned the Australian Government - the national Government - is the only one which has any standing at all. Nobody could have acted more promptly and fully than we did then. And when there are administrative things, such as discharging prisoners or discontinuing prosecutions or entering the draft, we did them promptly - immediately. We've already brought in the first three weeks of this new Parliament more bills than any Government has ever brought in federally in such a period all within the terms of our mandate. We believe they should go through the Parliament. If any of them are stalled, there's no question what the public response will be when we put them to the people at the Senate elections whether or not that is the whole of the Senate or whether it is jointly with another House of Representatives election.

You in this State have the great opportunity within the next couple of months to have a State election and there are so many things that we can only do by co-operation with the States. If you want to do anything about the use and the cost of land, if you want to do anything about public transport, if you want to do anything about the environment, or the national estate in general, the federal people can't do it single-handed. The State people can't do it single-handed. We don't have, federally, many of the constitutional powers, State governments don't have financially many of the necessary powers, but between us we could do any of these things. Now your great opportunity in a couple of months is to elect a State Labor Government again.

I've known Clyde Holding for many years. I've worked with him constantly. There's never a week goes by but we are in touch with each other and I can assure you that if you want an effective administration of this nation, of this city, the only certain way to get it is to have a federal Government and a State Government which without any inhibitions will carry out a joint program. Governments, Federal and State, which are both committed to the Platform of the Australian Labor Party. I didn't seek a mandate on anything which is not there. We got a mandate for things that are in there. I know we will not seek a mandate for anything which isn't in there, and it will all be in there, the lot of it will be in his program, between us without division, we will co-operate in seeing that this Platform is fulfilled. That's where we seek a mandate. That's the mandate we can expect to get. Now, the public, in the Victorian elections, will vote for Labor candidates if they believe that the Labor Party will discharge the mandate it seeks promptly and fully and that the Party will back it. Now we've carried out the mandate that we sought federally. I believe we are entitled to get the support of this great assembly, the most representative gathering of any political party in any State in Australia, and I believe if we get that backing for the mandate we sought and got and are discharging, that is the best hope of seeing that you have success in the Mtate elections. The Party backs its Government. That Government discharges its mandate.

Ladies and gentlemen, Clyde Holding and I, and our colleagues between us seek a mandate consistent with the Party Platform. We have shown federally that fully and promptly we will discharge that mandate. That's why the public are supporting the Party federally. I believe that the public of Victoria are entitled to a reassurance that the Labor Party will back the Government for which it works - the Governments for which the public gave a mandate. In that way, ladies and gentlemen, at the time of your next assembly you can not only have the Prime Minister and his Ministers but you can have once again a Premier and a Labor Ministry as well.

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