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EMBARGO: 7.30 P.M., 20 DECEMBER 1973

NATIONAL BROADCAST BY THE PRIME MINISTER

20 DECEMBER, 1973

Good Evening.

The other day I spoke in the national Parliament about the results and achievements of the Government which you, the Australian people, elected to office just over a year ago. Tonight I want to report to you briefly on some of the things we have done, some of the things we have attempted to do, and some of the things we want to achieve in the year ahead.

It has been a year of great and growing prosperity for Australia. You will remember that 1972, the year before Labor came to power, was a year of unemployment, under-use of capacity and poor economic growth. In 12 months we have restored full employment and boosted our growth rate from 2 per cent to 6½ per cent. Our overseas reserves are strong. Gross domestic product, consumer spending, retail sales and capital expenditure have all moved ahead. There has never been a time when prospects for our rural industries were as bright as they are now.

I don't want you to think for a minute that we are indifferent to the inflationary pressures on the economy - some of these we inherited, some are imported from other countries suffering from this worldwide inflationary problem. We have taken a whole series of bold and overdue measures against inflation, including two revaluations and a big cut in tariffs. If we had left things the way they were, inflation would be much higher than it is now. Our Prices Justification Tribunal is working - and working well. I think you will be encouraged, as I was, by the evidence of the latest consumer price index, which shows that the increases in food prices in the past two months have been the lowest of the year. The fight against inflation will go on. I simply ask you to remember that inflation is partly the result of a booming economy - an economy that in many ways is the envy of the world.

Let me mention some of the achievements of the past year in which my colleagues and I take immense pride. One of them is education. I think we can claim to have given a new deal to the children of Australia. We have nearly doubled the funds for education. We have appointed an independent and expert Schools Commission to ensure that those funds are spent where they are most needed. Our opponents - well, some of our opponents - recognised the great importance of our proposals, and our legislation was passed as Parliament was about to rise. I am glad to say that government and non-government schools alike can now plan confidently ahead on the basis of the greatly increased funds authorised by the Parliament.

We have taken action in other fields of education as well. From the beginning of next year all fees at universities will be abolished. One of our targets in the year ahead will be to set in train for pre-school education what we have already done for primary, secondary and tertiary education. We want a pre-school education for every Australian child.

You will see that the great theme common to all our reforms - as it is in education - is the promotion of equal opportunity. That has been the theme behind the enormous strides we have made in social security, in our support for equal pay, in all we have done for the Aboriginal people, for migrants, and in our plans for a national superannuation scheme for all Australians. This year we took the first big step in abolishing the means test. We lifted pensions and introduced new benefits for great numbers of people in need. We have tried, as best we can, to pass our legislation for a health insurance scheme that will cover everyone in the community. Remember, there are something like one million Australians who are not protected by the present scheme, for whom illness is a real and ever-present threat. I believe a nation as rich as ours, a people as fair-minded as ours, can afford to correct this injustice.

Next year we shall be pressing ahead with our plan to establish efficient community health centres throughout Australia, and set up a scheme to provide compensation and rehabilitation for those who are sick or injured. We shall continue our efforts, already well advanced, to improve our cities and upgrade the standards of urban transport. We shall embark on our plan for up-to-date child-care centres for every mother who needs them, or wants them. We shall make sure that building societies, hire purchase companies and other financial institutions - not just banks - offer fair and reasonable interest rates to home buyers and consumers. Much of the machinery for these reforms - the expert inquiries, the statutory commissions - have been established. Soon, I believe, every Australian will begin to feel the lasting benefit of what we have done this year.

I am proud of a Government that in the space of a year has abolished conscription, done away with the death penalty in the territories and the services, revitalised Government support for the arts, given votes to 18-year old citizens and moved vigorously to protect the environment. We have ended our tragic involvement in Vietnam. We have removed the hateful stamp of racism from Australia's reputation abroad. We have established a more mature and independent relationship with our friends in Britain and the United States. We have formed a new and fruitful understanding with China - instead of pretending that China does not exist. We are about to negotiate a firm and lasting treaty of friendship with Japan.

There is one other great theme in all we have done. That is: to preserve Australian ownership of our important industries, to safeguard Australian control of our precious resources. All of us have seen or read of the consequences, in other western countries, of the current energy shortage. All of us know of the great economic uncertainties facing many developed nations throughout the world. In this climate of uncertainty Australia has much to be thankful for. My Government - in its plans for the Australian Industry Development Corporation, for the Petroleum and Minerals Authority which we aim to establish next year - has moved swiftly to safeguard our known resources and to search for new resources which will remain under Australian control. This is the Government's great task for the years ahead. It is a task to which our whole philosophy is directed and attuned. In the development of our country, in the preservation of its great and increasing prosperity, we shall place the interests of Australia and Australians above all else. We believe Australians should own our country's resources.

The past year has been a busy year, a hectic year. We have done much, because there was much that we had to do. We have had our successes, our setbacks, our difficulties, and - naturally enough - our mistakes. But there can be no doubt about the great scope of our achievement or the importance of our plans for a greater Australia. It is in that spirit of confidence that I wish you all a happy Christmas, and trust that 1974 will bring peace and growing good fortune to all of us, and to all our families.