

DEBILGO: 12 NOON

THE SENATE v THE PEOPLE

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER,  
THE HON. E. G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,  
TO THE LABOR WOMEN'S CONFERENCE OF THE A.L.P.,  
TRADES HALL, SYDNEY,  
SUNDAY 31 MARCH 1974

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THE SENATE ELECTION ON 18 MAY WILL BE THE FIFTH SENATE ELECTION SINCE I HAVE BEEN LEADER OR DEPUTY LEADER OF THE PARTY; IT WILL BE THE EIGHTH SENATE ELECTION, AND THE ELEVENTH ELECTION FOR EITHER HOUSE, SINCE I BECAME A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT. I HOPE YOU WILL NOT THINK IT MERE GALLANTRY ON MY PART IF I CLAIM TO HAVE A LONGER MEMORY OF POLITICAL EVENTS THAN MOST OF THE LADIES IN THIS ROOM. THE FACT IS THAT I CANNOT RECALL A MORE IMPORTANT SENATE ELECTION THAN THE ONE WE FACE NOW. THE ISSUES AT STAKE, THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PARLIAMENT, FOR THE PEOPLE, FOR DEMOCRACY ITSELF, WILL BE CRUCIAL AND FAR-REACHING. FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND PERHAPS FOR THE ONLY TIME, WE WILL BE FIGHTING A SENATE CAMPAIGN OF GENUINE AND HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE.

I SAY THIS NOT MERELY BECAUSE OF THE REFERENDUMS TO BE HELD WITH THE SENATE ELECTION, IMPORTANT AS THESE REFERENDUMS ARE. CERTAINLY THEY WILL GIVE AN ADDED MEANING, AN ADDED DIMENSION, AN ADDED ZEST TO OUR CAMPAIGN. RATHER, I BASE MY CLAIM ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS ELECTION ON THE UNIQUE AND SPECIAL CHARACTER OF THE ISSUES - OR RATHER, THE CENTRAL ISSUE. THIS WILL BE A CAMPAIGN, NOT JUST FOR THE SENATE, BUT ABOUT THE SENATE. THE PEOPLE WILL BE PASSING JUDGMENT ON THE ROLE, THE RECORD AND THE RELEVANCE OF THE SENATE ITSELF. THEY WILL BE PASSING JUDGMENT ON THE OPPOSITION IN THE SENATE - AND THE RECORD AND MOTIVES AND CREDIBILITY OF THE OPPOSITION AS A WHOLE. FOR MAKE NO MISTAKE, THIS WILL BE VERY MUCH AN ELECTION ABOUT THE OPPOSITION. IT IS THE OPPOSITION WHOSE PERFORMANCE IS IN QUESTION. IT IS THE OPPOSITION WHOSE GOOD FAITH AND EFFECTIVENESS WE MUST EXAMINE. IS IT UNITED? IS IT BELIEVABLE? DOES IT SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE? IS IT MOTIVATED BY CONCERN FOR THE NATIONAL INTEREST OR MERELY BY SPITE, BY RESENTMENT AND A LUST TO RETURN TO POWER? THE RECORD OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THIS ELECTION WILL BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE; THE RECORD OF THE OPPOSITION AND THE RECORD OF THE SENATE WILL BE OF SUPREME IMPORTANCE. IT IS THAT RECORD THAT I WANT TO EXAMINE TODAY. IT IS A PATHETIC AND CONTEMPTIBLE RECORD; IT IS A PATHETIC AND CONTEMPTIBLE OPPOSITION.

IN DECEMBER 1972 - SIXTEEN MONTHS AGO - THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE ELECTED A LABOR GOVERNMENT WITH A DECISIVE MAJORITY IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. THE POLICIES ON WHICH THE GOVERNMENT WAS ELECTED HAD BEEN CLEARLY STATED. THEY HAD BEEN FORMULATED OVER MANY YEARS IN THE PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING FORUMS OF THE PARTY. MOST OF THOSE POLICIES WERE PUT TO THE PEOPLE NOT ONCE, BUT TWICE. IN THE ELECTIONS OF 1969 THERE WAS A SWING OF MORE THAN 6% TO THE LABOR PARTY. IN 1972, WHEN A SIMILAR PROGRAM WAS SUBMITTED TO THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE, THERE WAS A FURTHER SWING TO LABOR OF THE ORDER OF 2.7%. THOSE TWO ELECTIONS SAW AN EMPHATIC AND RE-ITERATED EXPRESSION OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE POLICIES OF A LABOR GOVERNMENT. IN THE MONTHS SINCE THE LAST ELECTION THE GOVERNMENT HAS ACTED WITH ALL POSSIBLE SPEED TO IMPLEMENT THE POLICIES FOR WHICH THE PEOPLE VOTED.

WE HAVE MADE GREAT PROGRESS TOWARDS A MORE JUST, MORE PROSPEROUS AND MORE HUMANE SOCIETY. MUCH OF OUR PROGRAM HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED. WE HAVE DONE MANY THINGS THAT WE PROMISED TO DO; WE HAVE DONE NOTHING THAT WE DID NOT PROMISE TO DO. IT IS TRUE THAT THERE HAVE BEEN UNFORESEEN FRUSTRATIONS AND UNPREDICTABLE DISTRACTIONS; BUT FOR THE MOST PART - ACTING WITH GOOD FAITH, ACTING WITH DETERMINATION AND VIGOR, BY SHEER HARD WORK AND A VOLUME OF PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS THAT SURPASSES ALL RECORDS - WE HAVE SOUGHT TO DISCHARGE IN FULL MEASURE THE TRUST PLACED UPON US BY THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE.

FOR ALL OUR ACTIVITY, FOR ALL OUR DETERMINATION TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE PEOPLE'S WILL, THERE ARE GREAT AND IMPORTANT THINGS WE HAVE BEEN PREVENTED FROM DOING. THE SENATE HAS BLOCKED AND DELAYED, AMENDED AND FRUSTRATED SIGNIFICANT PARTS OF OUR PROGRAM.

NOW THERE ARE TWO THINGS ABOUT THE SENATE THAT I ASK YOU TO REMEMBER. THE FIRST IS THAT NO PARTY HAS A MAJORITY IN THE SENATE. NO PARTY, AS THE SENATE NOW STANDS, CAN CLAIM A MANDATE IN THAT CHAMBER. IT IS TRUE THAT THE COMBINED NON-LABOR PARTIES - THAT CURIOUS COLLECTION OF FRUSTRATED LIBERALS, COUNTRY PARTY BACKWOODSMEN, SPLINTER GROUPS AND DISAFFECTED INDEPENDENTS WHO SUPPORT THEM - CAN MUSTER A MAJORITY; OF COURSE THEY CAN. BUT IT IS MEANINGLESS TO SUGGEST THAT THIS CONSTITUTES AN OPPOSITION MAJORITY IN THE TRUE SENSE, OR THAT ANY MANDATE EXISTS FOR A POLICY OF OBSTRUCTION.

AND THAT BRINGS ME TO THE SECOND ESSENTIAL FACT ABOUT THE SENATE AS IT STANDS. THE SENATORS WHO HAVE BLOCKED AND FRUSTRATED THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM WERE ELECTED YEARS BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. HALF OF THEM WERE ELECTED IN DECEMBER 1967; THE REST OF THEM WERE ELECTED IN DECEMBER 1970. TRULY THEY ARE VOICES FROM THE PAST; TRULY THEY ARE YESTERDAY'S MEN. YET THESE SENATORS, SOME OF THEM ELECTED 6½ YEARS AGO, PRESUME TO SIT IN JUDGMENT ON A GOVERNMENT WHOSE POLICIES HAVE BEEN TWICE ENDORSED BY THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE WITHIN THE PAST 4½ YEARS. I CAN THINK OF NO MORE FLAGRANT ANACHRONISM THAT THIS. I CAN THINK OF NOTHING THAT MAKES A GREATER MOCKERY OF A SUPPOSEDLY DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATURE.

I HAVE SAID THAT THE PERFORMANCE AND CAPACITY OF THE OPPOSITION IS CENTRAL TO THIS SENATE CAMPAIGN. SIXTEEN MONTHS AGO THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE PASSED JUDGMENT ON OUR OPPONENTS AS A GOVERNMENT; ON 18 MAY THEY WILL HAVE THEIR FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO JUDGE THEM AS AN OPPOSITION. I MUST SAY THE PROSPECT IS A DAUNTING ONE. FOR THE LIFE OF ME I CAN'T DECIDE WHETHER THEY ARE WORSE IN OPPOSITION OR WORSE IN GOVERNMENT. AT LEAST THEY CAN'T DO AS MUCH HARM IN OPPOSITION. IN GOVERNMENT THEY ARE EXPERT IN DAMAGING THE COUNTRY, BUT IN OPPOSITION THEY HAVE A POSITIVE GENIUS FOR DAMAGING THEMSELVES. ON BALANCE I THINK I PREFER THE LATTER.

I KNOW SOME OF YOU MUST BE AS CONFUSED AS I AM ABOUT RECENT EVENTS IN THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. THE FACT IS THAT WE HAVE NEVER HAD A MORE CONFUSED, MORE DIVIDED, MORE DISCREDITED OR MORE DEBILITATED OPPOSITION THAN WE HAVE NOW. I THINK WE CAN BEST APPROACH THEIR PROBLEMS ON A STATE BY STATE BASIS - THAT IS A GOOD SENATE PRINCIPLE, AFTER ALL - BUT THERE ARE ONE OR TWO GENERAL QUESTIONS TO CLEAR UP FIRST. FOR EXAMPLE, WHICH PARTIES BELONG TO THE OPPOSITION AND WHICH DO NOT? I AM NOT CLEAR WHETHER THE DLP BELONGS TO THE OPPOSITION. MR ANTHONY APPARENTLY THINKS IT DOES, BUT SIR CHARLES CUTLER IN NEW SOUTH WALES THINKS THE DLP IS FINISHED. NEVERTHELESS, THE DLP HAS MERGED WITH THE COUNTRY PARTY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND QUEENSLAND. AND WHAT IS THE POSITION OF THE AUSTRALIA PARTY, WHICH MR SNEDDEN HAS INVITED TO JOIN FORCES WITH THE LIBERALS? OF COURSE IT WAS AN EXCELLENT IDEA AND IT WAS WELL RECEIVED BY EVERYONE IN THE LIBERAL PARTY EXCEPT MR MALCOLM FRASER. MR FRASER DECLARED THAT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE AUSTRALIA PARTY AND LIBERAL PARTY WERE "TOTALLY UNBRIDGEABLE". SENATOR HANNAN SEEMS TO THINK THAT THE DIFFERENCES IN THE LIBERAL PARTY ARE ALSO TOTALLY UNBRIDGEABLE.

SENATOR HANNAN HAS FORMED HIS OWN PARTY TO GET RID OF THE TRENDIES IN VICTORIA, AND MR STEELE HALL HAS FORMED HIS OWN PARTY TO ATTRACT MORE TRENDIES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA. I AM STILL NOT SURE WHETHER LIBERAL VOTERS IN QUEENSLAND WILL BE VOTING FOR THEIR OWN SENATE TEAM OR FOR A JOINT TICKET WITH THE COUNTRY PARTY - OR IS IT THE NATIONAL COUNTRY PARTY? OR THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE, AS THEY CALL IT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA?

I MUST SAY THERE ARE SERIOUS DILEMMAS FOR OPPOSITION SUPPORTERS IN THIS SITUATION. IF THE DLP MATES WITH THE COUNTRY PARTY AND THE AUSTRALIA PARTY MATES WITH THE LIBERALS AND THE LIBERALS MATE WITH THE COUNTRY PARTY, DOES THIS MEAN THAT THE DLP HAS MERGED WITH THE AUSTRALIA PARTY? DOES SENATOR HANNAN SUPPORT THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE? DOES GORDON BARTON GIVE HIS PREFERENCES TO THE NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY? DOES MALCOLM FRASER SUPPORT STEELE HALL? DOES THE DLP GIVE ITS PREFERENCE TO CUTLER OR COURT - CHARLES THE FIRST OR CHARLES THE SECOND? IT MAY SIMPLIFY MATTERS IF I LIST ALL THE OPPOSITION PARTIES, NOT NECESSARILY IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE. AT LAST COUNT WE HAD THE LIBERAL PARTY, THE COUNTRY PARTY, THE LIBERAL COUNTRY LEAGUE, THE NATIONAL COUNTRY PARTY, THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE, THE NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY, THE DLP, THE AUSTRALIA PARTY AND THE STEELE HALL PARTY. I HEARD MR ANTHONY SAY THE OTHER DAY THAT HE WANTED A SINGLE ANTI-SOCIALIST ALLIANCE THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA. I CAN ONLY SAY THAT AT THE RATE THINGS ARE GOING, WE'LL SOON HAVE MORE ANTI-SOCIALIST PARTIES THAN ANTI-SOCIALIST SENATORS.



DOES ANYONE SERIOUSLY SUGGEST THAT THIS SQUABBLING COLLECTION OF BITTER AND DISAPPOINTED MEN, THESE BRAWLERS AND BACKBITERS, TRENDIES AND NON-TRENDIES, PHONY PROGRESSIVES AND UNREPENTANT REACTIONARIES, HAVE ANY CLAIM TO THE CONFIDENCE OF THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE? WHO SPEAKS FOR THE OPPOSITION? WHO LEADS THE OPPOSITION? YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE. JUDGING FROM THE PRESS IN RECENT WEEKS, THEIR MOST PROLIFIC AND CONSISTENT PROPAGANDIST IS SIR ROBERT MENZIES. ONLY LAST WEEK MR McMAHON WAS LAMENTING IN THE PRESS THAT HE WISHED HIS PARTY HAD DONE AS MUCH FOR EDUCATION AS WE HAVE. NOT LONG AGO HE SAID IT WAS A GREAT PITY THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAD NOT ABOLISHED CONSCRIPTION AND SET UP THE INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE COMMISSION. I REMIND YOU THAT WHEN THE LEGISLATION FOR THAT COMMISSION WAS BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT THE LIBERALS SUPPORTED IT WHILE THEIR SO-CALLED ALLIES IN THE COUNTRY PARTY OPPOSED IT. AND IF YOU TAKE THAT OTHER GREAT LANDMARK IN THE GOVERNMENT'S FIRST YEAR OF OFFICE - OUR ADDITIONAL GRANTS TO SCHOOLS - IT WAS THE COUNTRY PARTY THAT SUPPORTED IT WHILE THE LIBERALS VOTED AGAINST IT. WHAT UNITY! WHAT A COALITION! WHAT A COMMENTARY ON AN OPPOSITION THAT IN 16 MONTHS HAS PRODUCED NOT A SINGLE NEW POLICY, NOT A SINGLE FRESH AND CONSTRUCTIVE IDEA. WE ALL KNOW WHAT MR SNEDDEN IS AGAINST - HE IS AGAINST EVERYTHING. BUT WHAT IS MR SNEDDEN FOR?

HE'S FOR REDUCED GOVERNMENT SPENDING, BUT WHAT GOVERNMENT SPENDING DOES HE WANT TO REDUCE? HE DOESN'T SAY. HE SIMPLY WANTS US TO SPEND MORE ON DEFENCE, MORE ON UNNECESSARY SUPERPHOSPHATE BOUNTIES, MORE ON PRIVATE SCHOOLS THAT ARE ALREADY WELL OFF. THE CONSISTENT THEME OF THE OPPOSITION IS A NEGATIVE THEME. THE CONSISTENT VOICE OF THE OPPOSITION IS A WHINGER'S VOICE: THEY ARE A PARTY OF NARKS AND KNOCKERS - AGAINST EVERYTHING AND IN FAVOUR OF NOTHING.

I BELIEVE THERE IS A CLEAR REASON FOR THE CHRONIC DISUNITY AND DISARRAY IN THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. AND IT IS THIS: THEY HAVE NOT ACCEPTED THE FACT OF THEIR DEFEAT. THEY GO ON BELIEVING THAT THE VERDICT OF THE PEOPLE IN DECEMBER 1972 WAS A TEMPORARY ABERRATION; THAT SOONER OR LATER - NO MATTER HOW DIVIDED THEIR RANKS, HOW BARREN THEIR IDEAS, HOW MUDDLED THEIR POLICIES ON BASIC ISSUES - THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE WILL RETURN THEM TO OFFICE. THEY HAVE A DEEP CONTEMPT, NOT ONLY FOR THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE, BUT FOR THE GOOD SENSE OF THE PEOPLE. THEY BELIEVE THEY CAN FLOUT THE CLEARLY EXPRESSED WISH OF THE ELECTORATE FOR A PROGRAM OF ORDERED CHANGE AND SOCIAL REFORM, FOR ENLIGHTENED POLICIES TOWARDS OUR NEIGHBOURS, FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AT HOME AND MORE MATURE AND INDEPENDENT POLICIES ABROAD.

THE SENATE HAS BEEN THE GREAT INSTRUMENT FOR THIS CAMPAIGN OF OBSTRUCTION. SINCE WE TOOK OFFICE THE SENATE HAS REJECTED 15 BILLS, DEFERRED ANOTHER 10 AND AMENDED 21. I LIST THE 15 BILLS THEY HAVE REJECTED:

COMMONWEALTH ELECTORAL - TWO BILLS;  
CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION;  
REPRESENTATION - TWO BILLS;  
LAND ACQUISITION (AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY);  
SEAS AND SUBMERGED LANDS (ROYALTY ON MINERALS);  
HEALTH INSURANCE;  
HEALTH INSURANCE COMMISSION;  
AND, FOUR CONSTITUTION ALTERATION BILLS.

IT IS NOT DIFFICULT TO FIND A COMMON THEME IN THEIR OBSTRUCTIVE TACTICS. THE OPPOSITION MAY LACK A COMMON VOICE BUT IT HAS NEVER LACKED A COMMON CAUSE; AND THAT CAUSE IS THE DEFENCE OF VESTED INTERESTS.

IN DEFENCE OF THESE VESTED INTERESTS THEY REJECTED THE DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL ELECTORATES. THEY COMPLAIN ABOUT INDUSTRIAL UNREST IN THE COMMUNITY, YET THEY BLOCKED OUR ATTEMPTS TO MODERNISE AND DEMOCRATISE THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND PROMOTE THE CONDITIONS FOR GENUINE INDUSTRIAL STABILITY. THEY SOUGHT TO DENY REPRESENTATION IN THE SENATE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY AND THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY; THEY SOUGHT TO DENY TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT DIRECT ACCESS TO NATIONAL REVENUES AND BORROWINGS; THEY PRESERVED FOR FOREIGN MINING INTERESTS THE RIGHT TO EXPLOIT OUR OFF-SHORE RESOURCES; THEY FOUGHT TO PRESERVE THE INEQUITY AND INEFFICIENCY OF AN ANTIQUATED HEALTH SERVICE. BY SHELIVING THE TRADE PRACTICES BILL THEY LEFT THE DOOR OPEN TO MONOPOLIES AND CARTELS TO FIX PRICES, ORGANISE CARTELS AND EXPLOIT THE AUSTRALIAN CONSUMER. BY SHELIVING THE AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION BILL THEY BLOCKED THE MOST EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT FOR ENSURING AUSTRALIAN CONTROL OF OUR INDUSTRIES AND DEVELOPING NEW INDUSTRIES. THEY HAVE LEFT THE DOOR OPEN TO FOREIGN TAKEOVERS AND FOREIGN CONTROL OF THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY. YET FOR ALL THE LEGISLATION I HAVE MENTIONED THE GOVERNMENT HAD A CLEAR MANDATE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE.

DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF THE SENATE TO OBSTRUCT OUR REFORMS, THERE IS ONE AREA IN WHICH THEY ARE POWERLESS. THEY HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO PREVENT US PUTTING OUR REFERENDUM PROPOSALS TO THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE AT THE SAME TIME AS THE SENATE ELECTIONS. THIS WAS NOT FOR WANT OF TRYING. THE SENATE WAS DETERMINED THAT WHATEVER THE SENATE MIGHT THINK OF OUR REFERENDUMS, THE PEOPLE WOULD BE DENIED AN OPPORTUNITY TO DECIDE THE ISSUES FOR THEMSELVES. THE CONSTITUTION, HOWEVER, ENABLES REFERENDUMS TO BE PUT TO THE PEOPLE EVEN IF THE SENATE OBSTRUCTS THEM. THAT IS WHAT WE ARE DOING. OUR REFERENDUMS ARE DESIGNED TO GIVE A NEW DEAL TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TO ENTRENCH IN THE CONSTITUTION THE BASIC DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS OF THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE. I SUMMARIZE WHAT OUR PROPOSALS SEEK TO ACHIEVE:

1. To ENTRENCH THE RIGHT TO VOTE FOR ALL ADULT CITIZENS IN BOTH STATE AND AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS.
2. To ESTABLISH THE DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE FOR BOTH THE AUSTRALIAN AND STATE PARLIAMENTS THAT MEMBERS SHOULD REPRESENT EQUAL NUMBERS OF PEOPLE.
3. To ENSURE THAT STATE UPPER HOUSES ARE ELECTED DIRECTLY BY THE PEOPLE.

4. TO GRANT CITIZENS IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY AND THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN REFERENDUMS.
5. TO ENSURE THAT THE PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA REFLECTS THE POPULAR WILL AT THE TIME THAT THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA DETERMINE THEIR GOVERNMENT.

THE SECOND BROAD OBJECTIVE OF OUR REFERENDUM PROPOSALS IS TO BALANCE THE FUNCTIONS AND FINANCES OF THE THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT. THREE FURTHER PROPOSALS WILL REMOVE CONSTITUTIONAL OBSTACLES TO THE RATIONAL CO-ORDINATION OF INTERGOVERNMENT RELATIONS.

THEY WILL ENABLE US:-

1. TO FACILITATE THE REFERENCE OF LEGISLATIVE POWERS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO THE STATES AND VICE VERSA IF BOTH AGREE THAT THE OTHER LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT WOULD EXERCISE THOSE POWERS MORE EFFECTIVELY.
2. TO ENHANCE THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BY EXTENDING THE PROVISIONS IN THE CONSTITUTION WHICH GOVERN THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH STATE GOVERNMENTS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AS WELL.
3. TO INVOLVE THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE MORE CLOSELY IN DETERMINING THE BALANCE OF FUNCTIONS BY FACILITATING ALTERATIONS TO THE CONSTITUTION.

NOW TWO OF THESE PROPOSALS - THE ONE FOR SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE ONE FACILITATING AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION - WERE RECOMMENDED 16 YEARS AGO IN THE REPORT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE SET UP UNDER SIR ROBERT MENZIES. THEY COULD HAVE BEEN PUT TO THE PEOPLE - AND THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN PUT TO THE PEOPLE - AT ANY TIME SINCE THEN. THE PROPOSAL TO FACILITATE AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION WAS CLEARLY EXPLAINED IN THE REVIEW COMMITTEE'S REPORT IN THESE TERMS:

"...IF A CLEAR MAJORITY OF THE ELECTORS WHO VOTE AT A REFERENDUM ARE IN FAVOUR OF A PROPOSED LAW, THEIR WILL SHOULD NOT BE FRUSTRATED BECAUSE SEPARATE MAJORITIES OF ELECTORS HAVE NOT BEEN OBTAINED IN A MAJORITY OF THE STATES. IT IS, IN THE COMMITTEE'S OPINION, MORE IN ACCORD WITH DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE AND THE DEVELOPMENTS SINCE FEDERATION THAT IT SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO OBTAIN SEPARATE MAJORITIES IN AT LEAST ONE HALF OF THE NUMBER OF STATES."

THAT IS THE PURPOSE OF OUR REFERENDUM.  
INSTEAD OF REQUIRING A MAJORITY IN FOUR STATES OUT  
OF SIX, A MAJORITY OF ALL THE PEOPLE. THE TWO THIRDS  
MAJORITY IS UNREASONABLY HIGH. IN THE WORDS OF THE  
CONSTITUTION REVIEW COMMITTEE, IT MEANS THAT  
"FOR EVERY STATE IN WHICH THERE IS AN ADVERSE VOTE  
THERE MUST BE A FAVOURABLE VOTE IN TWO STATES ...  
A CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE HAS TO BE SUPPORTED NOT  
ONLY BY A MAJORITY OF STATES BUT BY TWO THIRDS  
OF THE STATES."



OUR REFERENDUM ON EQUAL ELECTORATES - THAT IS, ELECTORATES HAVING THE SAME NUMBER OF PEOPLE - RESULTS FROM THE SENATE'S FAILURE LAST YEAR TO PASS OUR LEGISLATION FOR ELECTORAL REFORM. THE SENATE TWICE REJECTED OUR BILL TO REDUCE THE PRESENT DISPARITY IN THE SIZE OF ELECTORATES. HAD THIS LEGISLATION BEEN PASSED OUR REFERENDUM WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY. IN THE SAME WAY, IF THE PREMIERS LAST YEAR HAD ACCEPTED OUR PROPOSAL TO GIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT DIRECT ACCESS TO THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES OF THE NATION, OUR REFERENDUM ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY. EVERY ONE OF OUR REFERENDUM PROPOSALS IS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE FAILURE OF THE STATES OR THE SENATE TO AGREE TO MEASURES FOR WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAD A MANDATE, OR THE FAILURE OF OUR PREDECESSORS TO PUT REFORMS TO THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE WHICH WERE APPROVED 16 YEARS AGO BY AN ALL-PARTY COMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION.

SO LET ME SUMMARISE THE ISSUES AT STAKE ON 18 MAY. THEY ARE CLEAR AND SIMPLE ISSUES AND THEY INVOLVE QUITE BASIC QUESTIONS OF DEMOCRACY. HAS THE SENATE THE RIGHT TO OBSTRUCT A PROGRAM CLEARLY ENDORSED BY THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE? CLEARLY IT HAS NOT. SHOULD A SENATE ELECTED IN 1967 AND 1970 BE ALLOWED TO OBSTRUCT A GOVERNMENT ELECTED IN 1972? CLEARLY IT SHOULD NOT. SHOULD AN OPPOSITION GUILTY OF THIS OBSTRUCTION - AN OPPOSITION BEREFT OF LEADERSHIP AND DEVOID OF PURPOSE - BE ENCOURAGED TO PURSUE ITS OBSTRUCTIONIST TACTICS FURTHER? IT SHOULD NOT. SHOULD A SENATE THAT HAS DONE ITS BEST TO PREVENT THE PEOPLE DECIDING BASIC QUESTIONS OF DEMOCRACY BE ENTITLED TO THE PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE? IT SHOULD NOT.

THESE ARE NOT ACADEMIC OR TECHNICAL QUESTIONS,  
THEY AFFECT THE ESSENTIAL RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE,  
AND THE PEOPLE ON 18 MAY WILL BE ABLE TO DECIDE THEM.  
I LOOK FORWARD TO THIS CAMPAIGN. PERHAPS, LIKE ME,  
YOU HAVE FOUND SENATE ELECTIONS IN THE PAST SOMEWHAT  
ARID AND POINTLESS AFFAIRS. THE REASON HAS BEEN  
THAT NO CRUCIAL ISSUES WERE INVOLVED; NO GOVERNMENT'S  
FUTURE WAS AT STAKE; NO BROAD POLITICAL PRINCIPLE  
WAS TO BE RESOLVED. ON 18 MAY THE REAL ISSUE,  
THE REAL PRINCIPLE, WILL BE UNMISTAKABLE. IT IS  
WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT OF THIS COUNTRY IS TO BE  
RESPONSIBLE TO THE PEOPLE WHO ELECTED IT, OR  
WHETHER IT IS TO REMAIN AT THE MERCY OF A SENATE  
ELECTED YEARS BEFORE, AND DOMINATED BY THOSE  
WHO HAVE FORFEITED ALL CLAIM TO BE A UNITED AND  
CREDIBLE OPPOSITION.

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