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EMBARGO: 3.00PM TUESDAY 30 APRIL

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P., TO AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN MEETING AT SPRINGVALE TOWN HALL, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, TUESDAY 30 APRIL 1974

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Labor is a national party. The Labor Government is a truly national government. We are the only party whose policies are directed, not to sectional interests, not to privileged minorities, but to the welfare of all Australians. For this reason it was natural and inevitable that we would be the first party to recognise that the true interests of the majority of our people would best be served by an attack on the growing problems of our cities. That was the central - and winning - theme of our campaign in 1972. It is the basis of all our major programs and policies in 1974.

To say this is not to suggest that we are concerned only with the cities. Of course we are not. It is merely to recognise that the great majority of our people live in the cities, and that policies for cities are therefore policies for people. All our plans for a richer and fuller life for our people - all our hopes and ambitions for their future, for the quality of their lives and their children's lives - are bound up with our plans for the cities. I ask you to keep in mind what this word "cities" implies in the context of our policies - it means better schools, better transport, better housing, better health services, better working conditions, a more beautiful and orderly environment. It means an end to urban sprawl, an end to squalor, an end to inefficient and dilapidated public transport, an end to much of the ugliness that has characterised the working and living conditions of our people for too long.

As in so many areas of political life, our initiatives for the cities have set the pace for all political parties. For what did "the cities" mean to the Liberal and Country Parties in 1972? For the Country Party they meant hostile concentrations of power; "city" was a dirty word, and still is a dirty word. For the Liberals, the cities meant one of two square miles of office blocks and financial institutions, the centres of corporate wealth and power. They had plenty of policies for the insurance companies and stockbrokers who made up the Liberal concept of the city. But for the millions of Australians who lived in the suburbs, especially in the fast growing outer suburbs, who yearned for a better deal in education, housing, transport, sewerage, health services and so many other things, the Liberals had nothing to offer at all. How gratifying it is that the Opposition is now putting forward policies for the cities - how gratifying, yet how cynical!

How empty and belated their promises are now. The men who ignored the cities for 23 years, who left them to the tender mercies of land sharks, property speculators and developers, who tolerated generations of urban sprawl, ugliness and inefficiency, who did nothing about the great and growing problems of high land prices, run-down transport, unsewered suburbs and inadequate health care - these men now come before you with their so-called policies for the cities, policies flung together three or four weeks before a national election which they have forced on the people by a gross violation of constitutional principles. Of course our opponents have "policies" for the cities. They dare not run away from this issue any longer. Their policies, insofar as they amount to anything at all, amount to no more than a continuation of the programs my Government has initiated and pursued during the past 17 months. I merely ask: whom should you trust to carry out these policies? The men who spurned them for so long, and have indeed done much to frustrate them during my Government's period of office; or the men who worked for years to create and propound these policies, and who see them as a basic and central ingredient of our whole political philosophy?

In my policy speech in 1972 I said that "a national government which cuts itself off from responsibility for the nation's cities is cutting itself off from the nation's real life". In its direct involvement in cities the Australian Government has entered the mainstream of Australian life. We want to remould, modernise and revitalise our cities; and to do that we want to remould, modernise and revitalise the relations between the three levels of government - national, local and State. The national government must accept at least as much responsibility for cities and centres as the national governments of comparable countries already do. At last we have a national government which is doing just that. We also have a national government which is determined to see that local government - the area of government closest to the people and closest to their needs - should have the opportunity and the financial resources to carry out their responsibilities. for the benefit of the cities, for the people, of Australia. Our referendums to be held with the election on 18 May will enable us to make grants direct to local government bodies who request them. We want to make local government a genuine partner in the federal system. This proposal has the support of the overwhelming majority of local government associations and councils throughout Australia.

Let me recall some of the great things we undertook to do in attacking the problems of the cities and improving the lives of their people. From the outset we set about this task with speed, with vigour and with determination.

I promised in 1972 to establish a Department of Urban and Regional Development to analyse, research and co-ordinate plans for each city and region and to advise the national government on grants for urban purposes. The Department was established as soon as we came to power. It is functioning with great effect under the leadership of Tom Uren.

I promised that we would request the Grants Commission to recommend the amount of national government assistance required to remove the inequality of servicing developing regions. We have carried out that promise. One of the first acts of the new Parliament empowered the Grants Commission to make grants to local government for this purpose in the same way that it has traditionally recommended grants needed to remove inequalities between the States.

I promised that one of the functions of the Department of Urban and Regional Development would be to conserve the National Estate, our national and man-made heritage. We have established a committee of inquiry on the National Estate and have received its report. Our first Budget provided an initial \$2.5 million to be applied to the preservation of the national estate.

I promised that we would make grants to the State Housing Commissions for welfare housing purposes conditional on the funds being spent on housing communities which provide a safe, pleasant, modern and civilised environment. Our Budget raised the allocation for welfare housing by 26 per cent. The national government has assumed virtually full responsibility for this important field.

I undertook through the establishment of a Schools Commission that the national government would accept direct responsibility for schools, whose welfare bears directly on the quality of life in the cities. I pointed out that the previous Government's system of per capita grants to non-government schools alone did nothing to help the establishment of new Catholic schools in growing areas such as this and gave no incentives for the reduction of class sizes or for the training of teachers in existing Catholic schools. It left existing Government schools as deprived and overburdened as ever. Through the Schools Commission the national government has accepted a continuing, comprehensive commitment to all schools on the basis of needs and priorities. We have almost doubled national government expenditure on education.

I said we were determined that every child in Australia should have the same opportunity then enjoyed only by children in Canberra to a full year's pre-school education from qualified staff in proper buildings. The Budget allocated \$10 million for an early start for the redemption of this promise and we are providing a further \$8 million to help in the construction and operation of child-care centres.

I promised a vigorous attack on the backlog of sewerage in our major cities. \$30 million was provided in the 1973/74 Budget to make a start on overcoming this backlog. Discussions are under way with the States to develop a continuing long-term program beginning in 1974/75.

I promised special help for the new developing regions of our cities. As a result, \$8 million was provided in the 1973/74 Budget to provide urgent assistance to local government bodies in the western sectors of Melbourne and Sydney.

I pledged an all-out drive to create new cities and regional growth centres. The Australian Government has offered financial assistance to the States for a program of development of twelve new growth centres in sub-metropolitan and regional locations. An amount of \$33 million was provided in the 1973/74 Budget. We have made a bold and encouraging start with the new city of Albury-Wodonga. This is an outstanding example of co-operation between the Victorian, New South Wales and Australian Governments.

I promised a vigorous campaign to upgrade the standards of urban public transport. We are providing \$32 million this year to the State Governments for urban public transport improvements. We are proposing to provide another \$41 million to complete projects commencing this year. Half the money has been allocated for the acquisition of new railway rolling stock, buses and trams. Additional new railway tracks will be built in Melbourne to relieve congestion and increase the capacity for express services operating to outer suburban areas.

Fundamental to our plans for better cities is an attack on the crippling problem of land prices. The cost of land is the greatest single component in the cost of a home and the greatest impediment to a fair deal for the average homebuyer. We pledged to set up Land Commissions with the help of the States to buy up large tracts of residential land in new suburbs and towns and sell them at fair prices as fully-serviced building blocks. The anti-Labor States have stalled on this proposal. They have dithered and blocked our plans while the cost of building land has continued to soar. Who are the interests who benefit from this obstruction? They are the land speculators, the profiteers and developers who have grown fat on the savings of young Australian families. Their interests, and their interests alone, have been served by the dilatory and obstructive tactics of the anti-Labor States.

Remember that the States have all the powers they need to control the soaring price of land. The anti-Labor States refuse to use them. And all the time land is becoming increasingly expensive - further beyond the reach of the average wage earner. In Melbourne the average cost of a block of land is \$13,000; in Sydney it is \$18,000. In Melbourne the rate of inflation in the cost of land more than doubled in 1973. It increased by 46 per cent, while average earnings

by 12 per cent. The cost of land in Melbourne now represents 60 per cent of the cost of a home. It takes the equivalent of 22 months' wages to buy an average block of land in Melbourne and 32 months' wages in Sydney. The Liberal State Governments have done absolutely nothing to check this scandalous profiteering in the price of land. They have great powers at their disposal. They have done nothing.

My Government established its Land Commission program to attack this urgent problem. We are determined to provide land at prices people can afford. We will not tolerate the increasingly common spectacle of thousands of young homeseekers being turned away from land auctions in Melbourne and Sydney while prices soar beyond their reach. In the first part of our program, we offered the Victorian Government \$30 million for a land acquisition program - the highest amount for any State. New South Wales was offered \$28 million, the Queensland Government \$6 million, the Western Australian Government \$6 million and the Tasmanian Government \$1 million. Only in South Australia has the Government taken appropriate action to attack land prices, and their legislative steps have done much to stabilise the price of land. They have also signed an agreement with my Government - they are the first State to do so - for the establishment of a Land Commission. What a contrast with the anti-Labor States! In New South Wales - where land prices are at catastrophic levels - the Askin Government has refused to accept our offer. In Brisbane - where land price inflation is running at 100 per cent a year, the highest in Australia - the Queensland Government has also rejected our offer. In Western Australia a hostile Upper House prevented the recent Labor Government from accepting our Land Commission proposal. And under Hamer nothing happens. There could be no better example of State Government obstruction at the expense of the people in Australia's cities.

Despite all the Liberal talk about the cities, their sudden discovery of the plight of city dwellers, their last-minute conversion to the cause of the cities, their record on land prices shows where their real interests lie. Here is an area where the Liberal/Country Party State Governments have great and undoubted powers. They have refused to use them. We will be judged by our record and performance. Let the homeseekers and young families of Australia judge the Liberals by theirs.

In the light of their miserable and obstructive record, who can take their last-minute promises seriously? They are vague and unspecified promises. Over all their promises - for the cities, for education, health and welfare - hangs the equally vague and unspecified commitment to cut back on Government spending. The people of Australia can be sure of one thing: if the Liberals were to cut back on spending, they would make their cuts in the only area where economies would be meaningful - that is, in the essential and historic programs my Government has undertaken to improve our cities and make them worthy places for Australian people.