

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
AT THE A.L.P. REGIONAL COUNCIL - TOWNSVILLE
SATURDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER, 1974

I take this opportunity - here in his home city and among the people he represents - of congratulating Percy Tucker as Leader of the Labor Party in Queensland. I have worked with him for many years as a colleague and known him even longer as a friend. The Labor Party in Queensland has a fine leader, a respected leader, a leader who will carry it to victory in this State and work with the Australian Labor Government for the achievement of our common goals.

Four days ago my colleague the Treasurer brought down the second Labor Budget in a quarter of a century. This is my first opportunity to speak to a gathering of the party since the Budget was presented. I welcome the chance to be with you because the Budget gave all of us something to celebrate. We have heard the expected outcry from the Opposition, the predictable condemnation from the wealthy, the privileged, the richest private schools, the stockbrokers, the speculators, the vested interests. What are the facts? The Budget on Tuesday was the most democratic and most radical in our history, the most comprehensive expression of the Government's ambitions and the party's philosophy that we have yet seen. It was a fair Budget, a humane Budget, a confident Budget. It was a great Labor Budget - a landmark in the party's struggle for humanity and justice.

You'll remember that for weeks and months beforehand we had a welter of advice and speculation about what the Budget should contain. Economists, academics, union leaders, politicians, leader-writers - the whole community was engaged in a quite unprecedented debate on the future of the economy. And I welcomed that debate. For there was a very clear lesson to be drawn from the abundance of conjecture and advice. It proved there was no obvious or conventional solution to our economic difficulties. Imagine what would have happened if there had been a Liberal-Country Party Budget on Tuesday night. There would have been no room for doubt or speculation then. We all know what their Budget would have done. How easy, how simple - how savage - that Budget would have been! Back to Dranconian measures and conventional remedies - massive unemployment, bankrupt businesses, idle factories, indiscriminate monetary restrictions. And an end to our plans for a fairer society and a brighter future for Australians.

Well, that wasn't our method. Of course we could have chosen the Liberal remedies, and I dare say if we had the Tory pundits and commentators would now be applauding our responsibility. But we weren't going to take it out on the weak, on the poor, on the disadvantaged, on the children, on the Aborigines, on the migrants, on the workers of this country. I have long held the view that the Budget is not just an economic document but a declaration of the Government's view of the kind of society we want and the kind of people we are. That is what our Budget was about. Nothing we have done has so clearly demonstrated, so clearly symbolised, this Government's philosophy and concerns, its priorities and aspirations. The choice was between Liberal remedies, discredited Liberal remedies, with the abandonment of our program, or a continuation of that program with a balanced and selective attack on inflation in which the burdens will fall on those best able to

bear them. We have framed a Budget which will raise the living standards of the great majority of our people. We have framed a Budget that will let us carry on the fight against inflation through flexible, discriminating measures and on a basis of sound co-operation between government and unions, employers and employees, and all sections of the community.

This wasn't one man's Budget or a victory for one set of ideas over everything else. The Budget was the product of weeks of intensive discussion - within Cabinet, with the Government's economic advisers, with the representatives of employees and industry. It represented the collective view of the Government, the whole Labor team, and in a true sense the ideals and aspirations of the whole party. Every Australian citizen is assured of a fair deal, a fair share, a fair go from our Budget. We have reduced taxation for employees on all but the highest incomes. We have cut back on lurks and tax dodges. We have made certain that those who live on rents and dividends and capital gains contribute their fair share of taxation to the revenue. We have made provision for those most in need - the war veterans, the families with handicapped children, the old, the sick and the Aborigines. And with all that, we have advanced and augmented our great programs for hospitals, schools, roads and new cities. It is the quality of these services that will determine the true standard of living of our people - just as much as the thickness of their pay packets.

In everything we have done we have kept faith with the people, the people who twice elected us to govern. We have laid the foundation for true national co-operation in the fight against inflation. That fight can now go forward with confidence. It won't be a fight in which only the fittest survive. The fittest will carry the heaviest burden. So every employee, every trade unionist, every producer knows that from now on the fight will be waged by the whole community - fairly and squarely. And I put it to you that it is in the interests of employees and their organisations to join that fight and safeguard the gains they have won for themselves and their families. I am not going to kid the workers of this country that the fight will be easy. I do say that the fight will be fair. Our Budget has ensured that the lowest paid worker will be especially protected from the consequences of an anti-inflationary strategy. We have established the essential conditions on which that strategy of restraint and co-operation can work. I appeal to the whole Labor movement to give it a chance to work. The rewards will be great. Employees and workers have most to gain from eventual success.

One of the great aims of the Budget is to raise the standard of essential community services - not just the services my Government provides, but those of the States. There has never been a Government more generous to the States. Yet I don't suppose there has been a Government more maligned and traduced by the Premiers. Our increased grants to the States did not begin with this Budget. They began with our first Budget last year and they have been augmented in numerous offers of special assistance. Our Budget on Tuesday provided massive increases in grants to the States of all kinds. The States will receive the largest increase in direct and special purpose grants ever made. They will receive 36 percent of the total outlays in this Budget. The Budget provides for a 32.4 percent increase in total expenditure and 39.5 percent of that increase will be payments to the States.

That is the answer to the phony, neurotic accusations of centralism we hear from the Premiers. Is it centralist for our Budget to allow a greater increase in the outlay for the States than for our outlays? Is it centralist to provide the States with record grants for roads, schools, hospitals, universities, sewerage and the improvement of the cities? Is it centralist to approve grants of \$56 million to the States for local government bodies on the recommendation of the Grants Commission? Of course not. All we say is that when the taxpayers of the nation provide money for the States on such a scale they should at least have some say - through their national government - in how that money is used. The whole centralist catchcry is threadbare and dishonest. I suggest that for the people of Townsville the real centralism, the really pernicious and arrogant centralism, is exercised from Brisbane.

Here you have a region rich in resources, a region rich in potential, rich in confidence and pride. You are part of a State equally rich and proud. My colleagues in the Australian Government share your confidence; we share your aspirations. We want this State and this region to develop and prosper. We are determined you will do so. The tragedy is that the development of Queensland and your region is being held back - not by us, but by the very State Government that professes most loudly its faith in the future of your State and in need for development.

On issue after issue important plans for Queensland's development have been blocked by Mr Bjelke-Petersen. Take our plans for this city, for Townsville itself. One of the first things I promised on behalf of a Labor Government - promised in my policy speech in 1972 - was to make Townsville a regional growth centre. Despite our representations, despite our correspondence, despite our personal pleas these plans have been stalled. By now the whole scheme for a greater, more prosperous Townsville could be well advanced - just as it is in Albury-Wodonga. Instead it is a victim of Mr Bjelke-Petersen's prejudice and suspicion. I don't ask him to like me or to like the Labor Party. What he thinks of the Australian Government is his business. What he does for Townsville is your business and Queensland's business. The blunt truth is that Mr Bjelke-Petersen would rather deny Townsville its limitless prospect for growth than swallow his pride and work with a Labor Government. Yet here is a Premier, a Country Party Premier, who professes his belief in rural development and decentralisation.

Where would Albury-Wodonga be today if the New South Wales and Victorian Governments took the same short-sighted view? They are not Labor Governments. There is little love lost between me and Sir Robert Askin - or Mr Hamer for that matter. They are big enough men to put the interests of their States before their personal animosities. The result has been a genuine creative partnership between the three Governments for the development of Albury-Wodonga. Our Budget on Tuesday allocated \$40 million for the new city. A further \$37.4 million has been provided for the establishment of other growth centres at Monarto in South Australia, Geelong in Victoria and Bathurst-Orange in New South Wales. If it's good enough for Sir Robert Askin and Mr Hamer, why isn't it good enough for Mr Bjelke-Petersen?

Townsville cannot afford to see its progress hampered by political rivalry. The north cannot afford it, Queensland cannot afford it. Your city is firmly established as one of the great regional capitals in Queensland and its future progress is unlimited. It has a major university, it is the centre of our northern defence programs, the chosen site of a marine science institute of international renown. With so much at stake, the future of Townsville and its region, and indeed all northern development, will depend on a healthy and productive relationship between the State and national Governments. Townsville has more to lose than any other city in Australia if politics is allowed to cloud and disrupt the one aim we all want to achieve - the development of the north, with more industry, more job opportunities, and improved facilities for present and future generations of Australians.

If North Queenslanders have reason to complain about government from the south they should direct their complaints to Brisbane rather than Canberra. All our objectives for the State and particularly for the north - our plans to halt spiralling land prices, to improve the quality of life, to make urban development more equitable and efficient - have been held up in Brisbane. Our 1973/74 Budget allocated \$2 million for land acquisition and development works in Townsville, \$1.2 million for similar work in the Moreton region and \$1.2 million for Gladstone. It is incredible that none of these funds have been spent - simply because we cannot reach agreement with the Queensland Premier.

So there is a real danger that Queensland's development will fall behind. I instance our plans for Land Commissions. The Budget this year provides \$24 million to South Australia for the purchase of land. That land will be resold to home buyers at fair and reasonable prices. The land price spiral in South Australia has been effectively brought under control. We are providing \$16 million to Victoria for a similar purpose. Even Sir Robert Askin has agreed in principle to our Land Commission. Queensland says NO. Or take our sewerage program. In 1973/74 Townsville was eligible for assistance under the national sewerage scheme. Mr Bjelke-Petersen wouldn't take the money. In 1974/75 we are allocating \$13 million to Queensland for sewerage works. Townsville's share will be well over a quarter of a million.

The other States are getting on with the job. Why should the people of Queensland put up with unsewered houses because of Mr Bjelke-Petersen's dislike of Canberra? This is an issue on which the Premier must carry the can. And why should Queensland be denied an international airport at Townsville? Again I ask: if it's good enough for the Liberal Premiers of New South Wales and Victoria why isn't it good enough for the Country Party Premier of Queensland?

The Premier clings to his obstinate ban on shipping between Queensland ports. He prefers to hold back development and decentralisation in the State rather than let an Australian Government ship do the work. This is ideological prejudice of the silliest, most self-defeating kind. Within 14 days of taking office in December 1972 I offered the use of Australian National Line ships for intra-State trade on the Queensland coast. Mr Bjelke-Petersen said the matter would receive consideration. I spoke to him about it in March last year. I wrote to him again in April and June this year. My last letter brought no reply.

I need hardly stress the importance of a regular intra-State shipping service. It would provide an alternative means of transport when the highways or railways are cut by floods. It would provide a more rational and diversified transport system. It would maximise the efficiency of the Townsville Harbour Board's facilities for handling freight. There are some types of freight that can only be carried by sea. We have seen the farcical situation of foreign-owned ships engaged to carry bauxite from Weipa to Gladstone because the Queensland Government refused to let an Australian Government ship do the work. There are ships plying between Queensland and the other States with space in their holds for 1000 tons of intra-State cargo on every voyage. I am afraid the Premier's intransigence finds little support from the people of North Queensland. The North Queensland Chambers of Commerce don't agree with him. The Queensland Harbour Board Association doesn't agree with him. The Townsville District Development Bureau and the Townsville City Council don't agree with him. Why should the people of Townsville agree with him?

We have put forward other measures to help Queensland's industrial development. For years I have been concerned at the high cost of electricity in Queensland compared with other eastern States. There are complex reasons for these higher costs but the Australian Government wants to help reduce them. I wrote to Mr Bjelke-Petersen on 5 June. I proposed that the Australian Government, in conjunction with Queensland, undertake a study of ways and means of increasing efficiency and reducing costs within the Queensland power system. The Premier has not replied; his department told us it was examining our offer.

I wrote to the Premier within weeks of the Government assuming office and offered to assume responsibility for the uneconomic State railway system. Railways impose a crippling burden on State finances and distort their whole budget. We waited a long time but eventually we got our answer. The Queensland Government was not even prepared to discuss our proposal.

The fact is that no Government has treated Queensland more generously, more openly, than mine. I read a remark by Sir Gordon Chalk the other day that the Queensland Budget this year would be "the best State Budget in Australia". I congratulate the Treasurer of Queensland. I trust the people of Queensland will remember that this situation has been largely made possible by the Australian Government's grants. Let's hear no more about us starving or strangling the States. It's claptrap! Total revenue assistance to Queensland in 1970/71 - to go back four years - was \$223 million. The estimated total in the present Budget is nearly double - \$434 million. Payments for general purpose capital funds have increased in the same period from \$93 million to \$145 million. Our assistance has increased over a whole range of special purpose grants - universities from \$7 million to \$41 million; colleges of advanced education from \$1.5 million to \$24.5 million; Aboriginal advancement from \$216,000 to \$2,085,000; community health from nothing to \$2.9 million.

How revealing to contrast the priorities of the Queensland and Australian Labor Governments! What are the issues that occupy us, the matters that dominate our mind? We could be pardoned for thinking that nothing is more important to the Queensland Premier than appointing a Queen of Queensland. Is that really an issue in 1974? Do we want a Queen of New South Wales and a Queen of Victoria as well? A Queen of Western Australia and a Queen of Tasmania? Does Canada need a Queen of Ontario and a Queen of Prince Edward Island? Perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps the most important issue in Mr Bjelke-Petersen's mind is the Privy Council. He wants decisions made by judges appointed by his own Government to be subject to veto by judges appointed by the British Government. Is that a burning issue in 1974? We know how much the Premier of Queensland relies on the courts. He is still using the courts to fight our legislation, to challenge the decisions of the joint sitting of the Australian Parliament, to overturn the wishes of the Australian people who twice gave their endorsement to the program of reform initiated by the Australian Labor Party.

I have no personal animosity towards Mr Bjelke-Petersen. I just wish he'd make up his mind what he wants for his State. We know what he wants for the Country Party - a mandate to govern with 20 percent of the vote, or preferably less. The fact is the Queensland's electoral boundaries are flagrantly rigged in the Country Party's favour. Its not just a little extra weighting for the benefit of remote rural seats. It's a masterpiece of malapportionment. In the 1972 State elections it took 12,849 votes to elect one Labor member. It took 9,163 votes to elect one Liberal member and 6,977 votes to elect one Country Party member. Provincial cities like Townsville suffer as much as Brisbane. The boundaries are blatantly designed to reduce their representation. The average enrolment in a provincial city electorate is 14,476. In the Western and Far Northern Zone it is 8,153. In the Country Zone it is 10,779. Under any fair system of boundaries the Townsville area would merit at least one additional seat in the Queensland Parliament.

So apart from a gerrymander, what does Mr Bjelke-Petersen want for Queensland? Does he want it to be part of Australia or a private realm of his own? Does he want it to share in the nation's progress or become a backwater? I wish he'd shake off his hangups and pettifogging obsessions about State rights and centralism and the monarchy and the Privy Council and get down to the business of government. I wish he'd forget his persecution complex and realise that the Australian Government is ready and willing to work with him for the good of Queensland. I wish he'd spare us his tantrums and posturing and let us get on with the job together. It is frankly not a pretty sight to see a proud and important State held back by its own Government. What we need is not a full-time Queen of Queensland but a full-time Premier of Queensland. Less vaudeville, less invective, less vote-rigging - more action, more enterprise, more co-operation.

In the 21 months since we came to office the Australian Government has offered the States a new deal. We have offered Queensland a new deal. The Budget we brought down this week confirmed that offer. It opened the way to a limitless future for this State and for all Australians - a future based on equity and justice. To achieve those goals we ask nothing more, we need nothing more, than a reasonable spirit of co-operation and goodwill. Let us get on with the job of building a stronger and more prosperous Queensland in a stronger and more prosperous nation.
