

QUESTIONS BRISBANE PRESS CLUB FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER 1970

Q Sir, to use one of your own phrases, is the media giving Labor a fair go, taking into account that some of your colleagues have accused the media of indulging in Labor bashing?

WHITLAM Well I've not made that allegation. I do agree that editorially we do not, of course, get as fair a go as the Liberals and the Country Party or the National Party. I've made no general allegation about that at all and I suppose I am one of that minority of the population that reads editorials at all.

Q Prime Minister could you comment on the announcement today by Mr Lewis The NSW Premier elect that the QLD and NSW Governments propose a council of state governments to coordinate a campaign for state rights.

PM Yes, I was fascinated by this. I gather they are going to establish a central body to crush centralism. Now whatever there may be about the way the Federal Parl. is elected however unequal electorates may be in the Federal Parliament, they are not nearly as unequal as they are in every mainland state parliament and I do not believe that the people of Aust. would accept that the state parliaments are as democratic as the Federal Parliament. The Federal Parliament could be more democratic if the electoral system was applied more equally as, for instance, it is in the United States. But the States are a blot on Australian democracy the way they are elected. You know in this city and in every provincial city in the State votes are worth only 2/3rds sometimes only 1/3rd of what other votes are worth in other parts of the State. And the most distant ⁱⁿ this State, Mt Isa, has one of the largest enrolments in the State - bigger than most of the electorates in Brisbane. So when it comes to letting the people decide what sort of government they will have, I don't believe the people would prefer for one minute the state parliaments of this country to the Federal Parliament. Despite all the faults of the Federal Parliament it's much closer to the people, it represents more accurately the views of the people, than any

of the mainland parliaments. Furthermore, I believe that the States - and this State is a conspicuous example - showed themselves unable to look after Australian resources, showed themselves unable to ~~in the past~~ provide opportunities for their citizens. You only have to look at what my Govt, my Ministers, have been able to achieve as regards exports. Three times as much is now being received for every ton of coal ~~is~~ exported from QLD than was the case when we came into power. This wasn't done by your state govt., it wasn't done by any other state govt. It was done by a national govt. at last doing what national govts in every other part of the world ^{are} doing. I mentioned coal, but the same applies to every other natural resource which we export. At last you have a national govt which does look after these things. The state govts always had the power to do it but they would fall over backwards in crawling to powerful companies - overseas companies too! Overseas companies have no respect for that. But they will cooperate with a govt. such as mine which also looks after the nation's interests. Not only coal but also iron ore, uranium and natural gas. All the things which are our greatest assets, after our skilled population, are getting a very much better return than any state govt was able to get for them. And when you look round at the places where most people live in this country what has ^{done} been ~~done~~ for public transport or sewerage - if I may mention it at table - or any of the things - schools and health centres that new suburbs - that new growth centres need. What had been done before we made it possible for something to be done about it? I don't believe people will give anything but a Bronx cheer for this very belated initiative - a central body to crush the centralism.

Q Is the PM aware that according to latest Dept of Labour figures Tasmania in fact has the highest unemployment in Aust? And will the PM explain why unemployed from throughout Aust are coming to QLD to fill the large number of job vacancies here thus creating an inaccurate unemployment picture in QLD quite contrary to the situation as outlined by the PM a few minutes ago.

P.M. It is true that there is quite a number of young people in the far south and the far north of the state. - the Gold Coast and the Tableland - Kuranda - and so on. That is true but they are only pockets. I believe I accurately stated the situation - that is, you have the opportunity to create a very great deal of employment in QLD if you only accept the offers which other govts - Labor and Liberal-

have seen fit to accept.

Q Two years on Monday you came to power amid I would say high hopes even in QLD of a new visionary govt for Aust. Many of your voters are obviously now upset by high unemployment in all states, inflation, and high interest rates. As the man who gave us that new vision for Aust will you please tell us and the voters what you feel has gone wrong and how you feel about it personally?

P.M. I am naturally very disappointed indeed that these circumstances have arisen. I know and everyone who takes the least interest in it knows that it is not an Australian phenomenon alone. There is no country in the Western world which does not have very much worse inflation than it had two years ago. Certainly Australia has. ~~ANXXXXXXXXX~~ The same as every other Western country. And this is of course a great disappointment - a great frustration. And no one, of course, is very popular because of it. But I am satisfied that the people, whenever there is an election of the House of Representatives, will realize that we at least have some positive programs. We have achieved a very great number of them and our opponents are doing nothing but nitpicking. They are narks. They are thoroughly negative. There is no program that our opponents have put up which bears in any way upon these things which affect Australia ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ and all other countries. Now there are some people who think that it might be possible to insulate us from rest of the world. You can't do that in Australia. We are a great trading country. We are the twelfth largest trading country overall in the world, and proportionately I doubt if there is another country which engages so much in overseas trade as Australia. Now in those circumstances it is impossible for us to live to ourselves. That is, we are all infecting each other, if you like, with these viruses of unemployment and inflation. I am satisfied that we have not taken steps, steps which have the earliest effect possible, but there is no way that you will get an immediate effect, but we have taken steps which will have the earliest effect possible and I would have every confidence that by the middle of next year we will have been able to reverse quite markedly the unemployment situation and even the inflation situation.

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Q As a democrat Sir, and as a democratically elected Prime Minister with a majority far greater than Mr Bjelke-Petersen's and is ever unlikely to be, you have taken a number of actions for which you have a mandate at the last election and the previous election on ^{basic} tariff cuts ^{on things like} which many people have admired you for and admired your courage for taking against the views of some other pressures groups and lobbies. Would you agree that no lobby, not even a trade union lobby, represented by Mr Hawke, has the right to dictate to the Government what it should or should not do.

P.M. I agree with you completely there. No lobby should dictate or, I believe, will dictate to us. You've mentioned tariffs in particular. One of the remarkable things is the way that trade unionists in some industries cooperate readily with employers - and they are not always Australian employers - to screw the public. That it is amazing how trade unionists, who are consumers, in very great numbers, and employers who are marginal consumers get together to make the Australian public ~~xxxxxx~~ pay very much more for their goods. This is an extraordinarily difficult ^{thing} to be economically rational in protection or tariff matters because there is a long standing feeling in Australia - ever since the Depression - that high tariffs are the way to make numerous jobs. Tariffs affect some industries and not others. They affect some companies and not other companies in the one industry. For instance, no-one in Holdens or Fords can really blame tariffs, but at Leylands they did. They are all producing the same sort of thing. Now if the tariffs were responsible for one company having trouble you would think it would also be responsible for other companies having the same trouble. But there wasn't the same trouble. The great thing that we have to bear in mind is that a country that has great natural resources as we do and a country which has a small but highly qualified and healthy, literate, numerate population ought to concentrate on its strengths and it is quite foolish for us to spend very much money on some products which we can get of good quality - just as good quality - cheaper from overseas. There are many more things, of course, which we ought to concentrate on which we can produce more efficiently and cheaply than any people outside and where we can compete with other countries. Some people in the trade unions, not less than among employers, are doing their very best to screw the consumer. Now it is very easy for trade unionists to speak up and they have in Mr Hawke a very effective spokesman. And some employers sometimes have a very effective spokesman. But unfortunately

consumers do not have effective spokesmen. You can't get consumers to get together and put their case. Now the public suffers as a result of that. Having said that I must concede that it is extraordinarily difficult to say to people who are being laid off at Leylands that they should view with equanimity a few thousand cars coming ⁱⁿ fully built up on the wharves three miles away. You can't expect people to accept that situation and we have acted to correct it because the imports doubled in one year. Well, you have got to moderate that sort of thing. Nevertheless the long thing which we have to bear in mind in Australia is that we need to use our human skills in relation to our natural resources to produce what we need ourselves and to sell what we can compete in selling in other countries. That is the best way for us to be prosperous. It is quite absurd for us to be making as many refrigerators, as many motor cars, as many TV sets as say the United States or West Germany. It is quite absurd that we should produce as many models of those things. We are getting no better models, but we are paying twice as much.

Q As you have personally and vigorously participated in the State election campaign, would you see the result as an indication of the electoral popularity of your government's policies in Qld. and also do you think your Federal opponents might use the election result and that of the recent N.T. polls to precipitate a general election next year?

P.M. I will very naturally be comparing the percentage of votes cast for the Labor Party, the Liberal Party and the National Party in Qld on Saturday week with the percentage of votes cast on 18 May last. Obviously I will be looking at that. But this is not a Federal election - it is a state election. But it does give me the opportunity to put, right rough Qld, the record straight. Frankly it is not possible for me to devote my time to what your Premier might laud against my Government day in and day out. I mean I have some idea of how to articulate and coherent the Premier is, but frankly I haven't got a word of public relations sense. That I assume that they know their master's voice and because one of these biblical things I suppose you can see the hand of Jacob in the paw of Esau. I mean I am not one of those political leaders who is thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament. I remember some of it. If I were to take time to answer every-thing about my Government

which is said by all the Premiers or just the Old Outgoing Premier, I would have no time for any other work. But since I have been invited to participate in this campaign on all sides, I thought - right, this gives me the opportunity to put the facts as I have today and to make the comparisons as I have today. And of course I will be watching very well the percentages that are cast. Now this is a state election, and I believe that in Percy Tucker there is a very effective and aggressive political leader. I have known him a long time and I am satisfied that we will do very well here.

Let me quote what the percentages were ^{at} the last state elections. We got six percent more than the other two combined and the National ^{Party} it was called the Country Party then - was just over 20%. ~~XXXXXXXX~~ My Party always gets 30% more votes in this state than the National Party does. You have also asked what ~~the~~ ^{what} the effect would be on the Federal opposition. One of the reasons why the Federal opposition, particularly the Liberals, every now and then say there should be an election, is because a ^{wh.} person of Mr Snedden clearly believes that this a very good insurance to say 'well look, there may be an election in three months - you can't drop me now.' Now the Country Party to its credit always wants an election federally, because it realized that its only hop of preserving its undue influence in the Parliament whatever Government is in power, whether it is a Liberal PM or a Labor P.M., is to preserve an unfair electoral system. So it's of course wanting to have an election to make it all confused. And the Liberals - or at least the Snedden Liberal
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If you win by one vote that's still winning isn't it! They are constantly saying 'don't rock the boat now we may have to launch there may be an election'. The only thing is that last May they suggested that if there was an even Senate that we should ~~take~~ ^{take} them down if they won. They never said that ^{was} an even Senate and we ⁱⁿ the House of Representatives that they would have another election. They never sought, they never got, ^{to} use the Senate to have ^{by} elections for the House of Representatives alone. They were the first people to do it. I would ^{be} ^{sure} they ^{had} learnt their lesson and of course one of the tribunes that ^{is} paid to the most magnificent of the Liberals in this state is the fact that he opposed it.