

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
 THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
 AT THE LAUNCHING OF
 "GRAB FOR POWER"
 BY LAURIE OAKES AND DAVID SOLOMON
 9 DECEMBER 1974

.....Reminding this distinguished gathering and also all those who listen to and view the media how much my Government has meant to the publishing industry. When I first started launching books at the request of the Australian publishers the books were printed overseas. The Australians were the authors but the printers and the publishers were not. On this occasion there are distinguished Australian writers, authors and skilled printers and, I trust, prosperous publishers.

It's ~~the~~ "Grab for Power" the book is called. Another from the tree of Oakes and Solomon. Some people may see a similarity between the events which precipitated this latest tome and the present time. Nothing is so dead as last week's scandal. Anybody reading this book will see how issues which were regarded as overwhelming, at the outset of the campaign, when ^{im}/proper grabs for power are made, how they can be transmuted in the hands of skilled practitioners during the campaign. The public gets a sense of proportion. The public sees what are the alternatives. They have to see not only the faults of the incumbents but the deficiencies of the challengers.

This book is, I'm certain, bound to be read by a very great number of people, from all walks of life. It is a fascinating story. Racially written, an exciting story. At the same time it is a substantial work of research and there will be young and old read about it, there will be professors reading it and ofcourse saying how much better they would have done it themselves, and I suppose if you can wait for decades that may be true. And there will be aspiring politicians who will say how much better they would have done it, achieved it or avoided it. I would like to pay tribute to the authors, because I've never

I would like to pay tribute to the authors because I have never known people to work so thoroughly and rapidly as Oakes and Solomon. They're very much better authors of books than interpreters in the daily papers. You can always rely on yesterday's paper being discarded, nobody can find it. But books like this endure. They will be around for a long time, and I believe it will stand the passage of time.

There are similarities, aren't there, between what people thought were the circumstances of last April and what some people think are the circumstances of today. But I think the Australian people have learnt from two aspects of the events of last April and May. The people who grabbed for power last April thought that Australians didn't know what went on in the rest of the world. They thought we were still an isolated, insular, backward people. In fact Australians, largely due to the press, are now aware of what goes on in other parts of the world. They know that Australia isn't so different from other countries, that in fact all the countries in which Australians are interested are very similar to Australia—socially, politically and economically. We all influence each other. And this is a process which is going to become more marked instead of less marked. All the things which appal people, distress people and I dare say, in the next couple of months will make many people hysterical, are also being found in other countries - the countries that people visit in the course of their duties. The countries which people should study. The countries with which we trade. The countries with which we compare ourselves. Appalling unemployment figures in Australia at the moment, but not as bad as in North America or most countries of western Europe or Japan. And the measures which I announced a month ago and some which I will be announcing, not directly face to face, orally as I am speaking to you now, but in a prepared statement, will I am sure convince you that in these matters Australia is not only still more successful than any comparable country but in fact is taking steps

which will mean that the position will improve - improve markedly , be seen to improve and be certainly very much better before any other grab can be achieved.

There's another lesson I believe we have to draw in addition to that concerning the similarities of conditions in Australia and those in North America, Western Europe and Japan and that is the sheer impropriety of what was done politically last April. Some people believe that having done it once, even though they didn't get away with it, they should or could do it again. I don't believe that Australians are impressed with those who still seek to destroy the system, to make it unworkable. In April, in May, nobody sought a mandate to use the Senate against either side which succeeded in getting a majority in the House of Representatives. There are often references to mandates. Mandates apparently are sometimes doubted when they're in the hands of those who win. But people, it would be extraordinary if it were held that mandates are in the hands of those who didn't succeed in getting enough seats. Now last April and last May the campaign was to form a Government and the Government was returned. There was never any threat, at that time, by the challengers that if they didn't get a majority in the House of Representatives they would still try to achieve a combination in the Senate which would thwart the side which got the majority in the House of Representatives. No mandate was sought, nobody came clean then and yet that apparently is the threat which is being held now. If you lose twice you can still destroy the system. Now of course it is difficult to govern in Australia now, it is difficult to govern in any comparable country, there is no head of government anywhere in the Western world - and for that purpose one includes Japan, Australia and New Zealand - who can rest securely or serenely. The system is under challenge everywhere, whether it is a system of divided powers, such as in the United States or whether it is a system of Presidential powers, such as in France or whether it is a Westminster system as in Britain itself or in Australia or in New Zealand. In all these systems there is immense stress and we jeopardise the system at our peril because in each case there is a history, there are some

traditions, there are some conventions which have made the system work and those who jeopardise the system have nothing to put in its place. These are serious matters. I sometimes, on these occasions, am somewhat more flippant. But I expect you expect me to say something rather more serious because there are economic and there are political matters arising from last April from which we should all learn. It is important that the political system in Australia should be effective. It should be seen to be effective, socially and economically and those who grab power and fail, those who do not get the support of the people at an election should not try to make the system unworkable thereafter. We are ending a year in the Australian Parliament where some bills have had to be debated seven times before they have gone through. Seven times, three times in each House and at a Joint Sitting. (unclear) Joint Sitting is held and the inevitable results flow from all six bills which came before it after six debates, before being debated at the Joint Sitting. Since that time there have been eleven more bills passed by the House of Representatives and rejected by the Senate and in most cases those bills were precisely stated in the policy speech of the Government Party last April. Ladies and Gentlemen, this grab for power should be a very salutary lesson to all. For whatever polls may say - and there was a Western Australian poll a couple of weeks before the grab was made - and whatever the economics, statistics and indices may show - and they were deteriorating last March and last April - whatever ephemeral scandals may emerge and be blown up. The fact is that the grab failed (unclear) and that any further grab is similar circumstances or circumstances which people thought similar, circumstances which blow some people's tops, any similar grabs similarly will fail. It's all a question of how soon Oakes and Solomon write the next book. I am satisfied that I will be launching it and in the same happy circumstances. I congratulate the authors, printers and the publishers and I am certain there will be thousands of readers for Christmas and in the following years who will enjoy these I am happy to contribute to it somehow. It has at least solved my Christmas problem anyway.