

QUEENSLAND BROADCAST NO. 3

GROWTH CENTRES

6 APRIL 1975

During the Easter weekend, I visited Albury where 2,000 delegates from all over Australia were attending the Annual Apex Convention. As well as attending the Apex Convention I was able to see the progress being made on one of the most exciting experiments ever undertaken in Australia. The governments of New South Wales and Victoria are cooperating fully with the Australian Government in the development of Albury-Wodonga as a growth centre. There on the banks of the Murray, the three governments and the people of Albury-Wodonga are working together to create what will be virtually a new inland city - Australia's first such since the founding of Canberra itself, more than sixty years ago.

Reflecting on what is happening in Albury, one can't help drawing a contrast with what is happening - or rather, what is not happening here in Queensland - to be precise, here in Townsville where I am recording this broadcast. It's a very unfortunate story. For the fact is that the development taking place in Albury, the finance being made available, could be and should be paralleled in Townsville.

In the policy speech for the elections of 1972, I said this:

"In our first term of office, a Federal Labor Government will concentrate its own initiatives and endeavours on two areas - Albury-Wodonga and Townsville. At Albury-Wodonga the Commonwealth has all the ingredients for a successful effort to establish another inland city the size of Canberra. The Commonwealth is already responsible for decisions which have determined the growth - and the burdens - of Townsville more than any other Australian city, except Canberra itself."

That was what I said in 1972. The new government moved very promptly to meet its undertakings. The Albury-Wodonga project is going ahead. Townsville has stalled. Why the difference?

I have to be quite blunt. The sole difference lies in the attitude of the State Governments concerned.

From the beginning, we had good cooperation from the Premiers of New South Wales and Victoria. Sure, there were problems to be sorted out. The State Governments - both of them - incidentally, non-Labor Governments - sought and obtained assurances about their own role and responsibilities. That's fair enough.

But the important thing was that the basic approach by the three governments was a desire to cooperate, a desire to see that the project succeeds. During my Easter visit to Albury, I was able to make a joint statement with the Premiers of New South Wales and Victoria, announcing that we had signed an agreement providing \$40 million from the Australian Government for further development at Albury-Wodonga. So the work is going ahead. My promise of 1972 is being fulfilled.

I am afraid I can't report the same progress with Townsville. The fruitful cooperation we have had with the non-Labor Government in New South Wales and Victoria just has not been forthcoming from the Queensland Government. In both the 1973 Budget and last year's Budget, we allocated very substantial sums to the States for land acquisition and growth centre programs - \$30 million in 1973, \$125 million in 1974-75. Initially we offered the Queensland Government over \$4 million specifically for development in Townsville. That offer has never been taken up.

Our interest in Townsville is very close. The growth of Townsville in recent years has owed very much to initiatives by the Australian Government, to decisions made indeed by the previous Australian Government. The James Cook University, the Marine Research Institute and the choice of Townsville as the headquarters of our northern defence system have shaped the Townsville of today. The growth that these institutions and installations have brought, has also imposed very heavy burdens on Townsville's services and amenities. It would be intolerable for any Australian Government to ignore the consequences of its own initiatives for the people of Townsville - the taxpayers, the ratepayers. We can't expect the people of Townsville to foot the bill for new community needs which have been created by decisions of the Australian Government, so we want to contribute. We want to cooperate with the State Government and Townsville's local authorities, to ensure that Townsville grows in a well-ordered, well-planned way, that proper community services are provided, that land prices are held down. But we just are not receiving the necessary cooperation.

Why should this be so? What nonsense it is to talk of this being an example of centralism, and what nonsense it is to talk of this in terms of State rights. What we offer is a splendid opportunity for genuine decentralisation. This is what is being achieved at Albury-Wodonga. Why should it not be achieved in Queensland? Why should the non-Labor Premier of Queensland refuse the kind of cooperation we have had from the non-Labor Premiers of New South Wales and Victoria. What is it that Mr Bjelke-Petersen sees so sinister in an offer which is perfectly acceptable to Mr Lewis and Mr Hamer?

It is not too late although with every month that passes the problems of Townsville's growth will mount and the cost of solving them will go up. But our offer - the offer I made in 1972 - still stands. It requires only a word from Mr Bjelke-Petersen - a word that would indicate his willingness to cooperate in the way that his southern colleagues are cooperating. This is something of concern to Townsville. It is in the interest of Queensland as a whole that the Australian Government should be involved in developing growth centres, not only in Townsville but also in the Fitzroy and Moreton regions. But if these projects are to go ahead, then we must have cooperation from the State Government. Queenslanders should insist that that cooperation is forthcoming.