

Ambergo 4.00pm

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,  
TO THE FEDERATED MUNICIPAL AND SHIRE COUNCIL EMPLOYEES' UNION  
26 MAY 1975

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NO GROUP OF AUSTRALIAN EMPLOYEES HAVE HAD GREATER RESPONSIBILITIES IMPOSED UPON THEM THROUGH THE POLICIES OF MY GOVERNMENT THAN EMPLOYEES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT. EQUALLY, NO GROUP OF AUSTRALIAN EMPLOYEES HAVE HAD THEIR OPPORTUNITIES MORE ENHANCED THAN THOSE EMPLOYED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT. IN ACCEPTING YOUR INVITATION I ACKNOWLEDGE THIS, ACKNOWLEDGE OUR DEBT AND AFFIRM OUR MUTUAL OPPORTUNITIES. THE POLICIES OF THIS GOVERNMENT CANNOT SUCCEED WITHOUT YOUR CO-OPERATION.

IN A VERY REAL SENSE, LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ARE THE FRONT-LINE TROOPS IN OUR BATTLE TO PROMOTE THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN AUSTRALIA'S CITIES AND REGIONS, AND TO PROMOTE EQUALITY BETWEEN REGIONS. FRONT-LINE TROOPS MUST, OF COURSE, EXPECT TO COP A GREAT DEAL OF THE FLAK. WE CAN ALL ANTICIPATE IN THE COMING MONTHS A STRENGTHENING OF THE ATTACK ON THE GROWTH OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR, ON THE SO-CALLED BLOATED BUREAUCRACY. THESE ATTACKS ALWAYS HAVE ONE AIM - TO DIVIDE THE COMMUNITY, TO BUILD UP RESENTMENT AGAINST PUBLIC INITIATIVES, TO DEPICT THE WORKFORCE AS BEING COMPOSED OF TWO MUTUALLY HOSTILE SECTORS - THE WORKERS VERSUS THE DRONES. FOR THE PURPOSE OF THAT PARTICULAR EXERCISE, THOSE PAID BY GOVERNMENT - FEDERAL, STATE OR LOCAL - ARE DEPICTED AS THE DRONES. THIS COMPARTMENTALISATION IS ESSENTIALLY PHONEY. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, IN TERMS OF PRODUCTIVITY OR SOCIAL WORTH, TO DRAW A DISTINCTION BETWEEN EMPLOYEES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND THOSE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

ACCORDING TO THE FALLACY OF PRIVATE WORTH VERSUS PUBLIC WASTE, THE CLERK IN ONE OF THE 110 PRIVATE HEALTH FUNDS IS ECONOMICALLY PRODUCTIVE WHILE THE CLERK DOING EXACTLY THE SAME WORK THROUGH MEDIBANK IS A BLUDGER. THE PRIVATE BUS OPERATOR PRODUCES; THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKER IS A PARASITE. THE BREWERY WORKER CONTRIBUTES TO THE GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT; THE WATER BOARD MAN DOES NOT. THE SHIRE ENGINEER IS IN SOME WAY A LESS USEFUL, LESS PRODUCTIVE CITIZEN THAN A PRIVATELY-EMPLOYED ONE. OF COURSE THIS IS ALL SO MUCH NONSENSE.

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ECONOMICALLY AND SOCIALLY, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR ARE INTERDEPENDENT. NO MODERN COMMUNITY CAN SENSIBLY OR MEANINGFULLY DRAW A SHARP DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE PRIVATE OR PUBLIC PROVISION OF GOODS AND SERVICES, WHOEVER PRODUCES OR PROVIDES THEM. IN MODERN COMMUNITIES, THE PROVISION OF SERVICES, EVEN MORE THAN THE PRODUCTION OF GOODS, DETERMINES THE REAL LEVEL OF A COMMUNITY'S WELFARE AND A FAMILY'S STANDARD OF LIVING. AND INCREASINGLY THOSE SERVICES MUST BE PROVIDED BY THE COMMUNITY ITSELF, OR THEY WILL NOT BE PROVIDED AT ALL. WHO WOULD NOW ARGUE THAT THE PRODUCTION OF PRIVATE CARS WAS A MORE ACCURATE OR MORE RELEVANT MEASURE OF PROSPERITY THAN THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT? WHO WOULD NOW ARGUE THAT A SUBURBAN HOME STOCKED WITH EVERY GLITTERING MODERN APPLIANCE WAS SATISFACTORY IF IT LACKED THE BASIC AMENITY OF SEWERAGE?

I SET OUT THE BASIS OF AN APPROACH IN THE POLICY SPEECH OF 1972 IN THESE TERMS:

"EVEN THE MOST ENLIGHTENED AND EQUAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL WELFARE CAN ONLY SCRATCH THE SURFACE OF THE BASIC PROBLEM OF EQUALITY AND WELL-BEING OF MOST OF OUR CITIZENS. WE CAN DOUBLE AND TREBLE SOCIAL BENEFITS, BUT WE CAN NEVER MAKE UP THROUGH CASH PAYMENTS FOR WHAT WE TAKE AWAY IN MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH THE BREAKDOWN OF COMMUNITY LIFE AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY.

INCREASINGLY, A CITIZEN'S REAL STANDARD OF LIVING, THE HEALTH OF HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY, HIS CHILDREN'S OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATION AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT, HIS ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, HIS ABILITY TO ENJOY THE NATION'S RESOURCES FOR RECREATION AND CULTURE, HIS ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DECISIONS AND ACTIONS OF THE COMMUNITY ARE DETERMINED NOT BY HIS INCOME, NOT BY THE HOURS HE WORKS, BUT BY WHERE HE LIVES. THIS IS WHY LABOR BELIEVES THAT THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT MUST INVOLVE ITSELF DIRECTLY IN CITIES AND CENTRES WHERE MOST PEOPLE LIVE."

THE MAJOR INSTRUMENT FOR THE PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THAT PHILOSOPHY IS LOCAL GOVERNMENT. WHAT IS NOW UNDERWAY IS A TRANSFORMATION OF THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CONSEQUENTLY A TRANSFORMATION OF THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES. DON'T FORGET - AND DON'T LET THE PUBLIC FORGET - THAT WHEN BUSINESS, AND THE PRESS ATTACK THE BUREAUCRACY, THEY ARE NOT JUST AIMING AT THE CANBERRA PUBLIC SERVANTS; THEY'RE AIMING AT YOU AND YOUR FELLOW-MEMBERS AS WELL. IN FACT IN 1974-75 THE FASTEST-GROWING SEGMENT OF THE PUBLIC WORK-FORCE WAS NOT THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE - BUT EMPLOYMENT THROUGH LOCAL GOVERNMENT. THE GROWTH OF THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE WAS THE LOWEST OF THE THREE - FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL.

FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT FROM MARCH 1974 TO MARCH 1975 INCREASED 4.8 PER CENT, STATE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT BY 6.4 PER CENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT BY 11.4 PER CENT. I SHOULD POINT OUT THAT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FIGURE SIGNIFICANTLY REFLECTS THE OPERATION OF THE REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT SCHEME. THE FIGURES DO, HOWEVER, EXPLODE THE MYTH OF UNCONTROLLED GROWTH OF THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE.

I SHOULD FURTHER POINT OUT THAT ONE OF THE MAJOR FACTORS DETERMINING THE RATE OF GROWTH OF THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE IS THE NEED TO RECRUIT STAFF TO PLAN AND OPERATE PROGRAMS DIRECTLY RELATED TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES. THIS GOES MUCH FURTHER THAN THE CREATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE CITIES COMMISSION AND THE NEW INVOLVEMENT OF THE GRANTS COMMISSION IN REGIONAL AFFAIRS. A GREAT NUMBER OF FEDERAL DEPARTMENTS ARE NOW WORKING DIRECTLY WITH STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP A WHOLE RANGE OF NEW LOCAL PROGRAMS; INCLUDING SOCIAL SECURITY, HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND IMMIGRATION, ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS, TOURISM AND RECREATION, TRANSPORT, AND HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION.

THIS EXPANSION OF ACTIVITIES HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH CENTRALISM. IT DOES MEAN VASTLY EXPANDED OPPORTUNITIES FOR CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND A VASTLY ENHANCED ROLE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT. WE HAVE SOUGHT TO MAKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT A GENUINE PARTNER IN AUSTRALIA'S FEDERAL SYSTEM.

WHEN AS LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY I BEGAN TO BRING LOCAL QUESTIONS TO THE CENTRE OF THE NATIONAL DEBATE I WAS SAID TO BE DEMEANING BOTH THE DEBATE AND MYSELF. I REMEMBER THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD THOUGHT IT HILARIOUS THAT A NATIONAL LEADER SHOULD SUGGEST, FOR INSTANCE, THAT SEWERAGE WAS A NATIONAL QUESTION. MY APPROACH WAS AND IS THAT THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT MUST ACCEPT A GREATER INVOLVEMENT IN A WHOLE RANGE OF MATTERS WHICH WERE ONCE DEEMED TO BE THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STATE OR OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT. THAT IS NOT BECAUSE OF ANY BELIEF IN THE INHERENT SUPERIORITY OF CANBERRA. IT IS SIMPLY THAT UNDER THE OLD APPROACH, THE SERVICES WHICH A MODERN COMMUNITY NOW REQUIRES SHOULD BE PROVIDED THROUGH ITS ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES WERE EITHER PROVIDED INADEQUATELY OR NOT AT ALL, WERE FINANCED INADEQUATELY AND UNFAIRLY, OR NOT AT ALL. IT IS NOW INEVITABLE THAT THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT SHALL ACCEPT INCREASING RESPONSIBILITY TO FINANCE THESE FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES FAIRLY AND ADEQUATELY. WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HAS TRIED TO DO IS TO CREATE THE INSTITUTIONS AND MACHINERY, AND TO APPOINT THE MEN AND WOMEN WHEREBY THIS INEVITABLE GROWTH OF RESPONSIBILITY CAN BE DISCHARGED EFFICIENTLY AND FAIRLY.

THE GREAT OBJECTIVE HAS BEEN TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALISE OPPORTUNITIES BETWEEN REGIONS. THE MAJOR INSTRUMENT IN THIS TASK IS THE GRANTS COMMISSION. THIS YEAR \$56 MILLION HAS BEEN MADE AVAILABLE TO 806 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES UNDER RECOMMENDATION MADE BY THE COMMISSION.

I MENTION BRIEFLY SOME OTHER NEW PROGRAMS WHICH DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY PROVIDE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR MEMBERS.

LAST YEAR WE PROVIDED \$28 MILLION UNDER OUR NATIONAL SEWERAGE PROGRAM. THIS YEAR THE ESTIMATE IS \$108 MILLION AND THE PROGRAM HAS BEEN EXTENDED TO TOWNS WITH A POPULATION OF MORE THAN 10,000.

FOR THE FIRST TIME WE HAVE MADE URBAN LOCAL ROADS ELIGIBLE FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT.

THIRTEEN AREA IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS COSTING \$14 MILLION ARE NOW OPERATING.

THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM AND RECREATION AND OTHER AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENTS SUCH AS DEPARTMENT OF URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ARE CONSULTING AT LOCAL LEVEL ON THE RECREATIONAL NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE.

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OUR GRANTS PROGRAM HAS MADE A START TOWARDS MEETING THOSE NEEDS. WE HAVE THIS YEAR ALLOCATED \$2.25 MILLION FOR GRANTS FOR LOCAL TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AND FACILITIES. WE ARE ESTABLISHING ADVISORY COMMITTEES FOR CONSULTATION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT, REGIONAL TOURIST ORGANISATIONS AND INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES TO PLAN REGIONAL TOURIST DEVELOPMENT. WE HAVE EXPANDED THE PROGRAM OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP OF AERODROMES.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT HAS PARTICIPATED IN THE INTERIM PROGRAM FOR PRE-SCHOOL AND CHILD-CARE SERVICES. ABOUT HALF OF THE 122 CAPITAL PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN THROUGH OUR CHILD-CARE PROGRAM WERE SPONSORED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES.

WE HAVE MADE AVAILABLE MORE THAN \$3½ MILLION IN DIRECT GRANTS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES FOR ABORIGINAL ADVANCEMENT IN THE PAST YEAR. MOST OF THAT WAS ALLOCATED UNDER THE SPECIAL WORK PROJECTS SCHEME ADMINISTERED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES.

WE HAVE COOPERATED CLOSELY WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE CREATION OF THE REGIONAL COUNCILS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN ASSISTANCE PLAN.

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THE LEGISLATION FOR THE HOSPITALS AND HEALTH SERVICES COMMISSION PROVIDES FOR THE COMMISSION TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO BE MADE AVAILABLE BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AFTER CONSULTATIONS WITH THE STATES. THE COMMUNITY HEALTH PROGRAM AND THE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH, ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCY PROGRAM, BOTH INTRODUCED IN 1973, PROVIDE FOR DIRECT GRANTS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS. LOCAL GOVERNMENT NOW HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE DIRECTLY IN THE PROVISION OF A WIDE RANGE OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND FACILITIES AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL, WHERE ITS PARTICIPATION CAN BE MOST EFFECTIVE.

THROUGH ALL THESE AND OTHER PROGRAMS, WE ARE STRIVING TO EXPAND AND EQUALISE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL REGIONS AND AS BETWEEN REGIONS. IT IS NOT ONLY A MATTER OF IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL CITIZENS, FOR ALL PEOPLE LIVING IN AUSTRALIA, WHEREVER THEY LIVE IN AUSTRALIA - THOUGH THAT IS THE BASIC AIM. THESE PROGRAMS WILL INEVITABLY PROMOTE THE OPPORTUNITIES OF YOUR MEMBERS, NOT JUST FOR EMPLOYMENT, BUT FOR MORE REWARDING, MORE SELF-SATISFYING EMPLOYMENT. WHEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT WAS TREATED AS THE CINDERELLA OF GOVERNMENT, WHEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT WAS POORLY FINANCED AND LOWLY REGARDED, ALL THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH IT, AND EMPLOYED THROUGH IT, PAID A PRICE - IN SALARY AND WAGES AND IN PUBLIC ESTEEM. THIS IS NOT ENDED YET: THERE IS STILL A LONG WAY TO GO. BUT UNTIL LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS A GENUINE, A FULL AND COMPLETE PARTNER IN THE FEDERAL SYSTEM, THOSE EMPLOYED AT THAT LEVEL WILL SUFFER.

THE FACT IS THAT STATE AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN LOUSY EMPLOYERS. THIS IS THE PRINCIPAL REASON WHY MOST STRIKES - THE MOST FREQUENT STRIKES, THE WORST STRIKES, THE LONGEST STRIKES - OCCUR IN THE GREAT SERVICE INSTRUMENTALITIES AND AMONG EMPLOYEES UNDER THE GREAT PUBLIC AUTHORITIES, STATE OR LOCAL. IN RAISING THE LEVEL AND PRESTIGE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SEMI-GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES, THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HOPES, NOT ONLY TO PROMOTE THE QUALITY OF AUSTRALIAN LIFE, BUT TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THOSE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES TO GIVE THEIR OWN EMPLOYEES AS GOOD CONDITIONS, AS GOOD REMUNERATION, AS GOOD OPPORTUNITIES, AND AS GOOD A CHANCE FOR A DECENT, FULFILLING OCCUPATION, AS ANY EMPLOYEES IN AUSTRALIA.