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STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER,  
THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
THURSDAY, 5 JUNE 1975

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WHEN I LAST REPORTED TO THE PARLIAMENT ON THE GOVERNMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS AT THE END OF THE SITTINGS IN DECEMBER 1974, I STRESSED THE CONTINUING IMPORTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAMS. I EMPHASISED THAT WE WOULD PRESS AHEAD WITH OUR PROGRAMS IN FULFILMENT OF THE UNDERTAKINGS WE HAD GIVEN TO THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE. THE PEOPLE HAD TWICE ENDORSED THOSE PROGRAMS AT THE ELECTIONS OF 1972 AND 1974. THEY HAD TWICE CONFIRMED THE TRUST PLACED IN US. THE LAST SIX MONTHS - THIS FIRST SESSIONAL PERIOD OF 1975 - HAVE BROUGHT US CLOSER TO THE GREAT GOALS WE PROCLAIMED. FOR ALL OUR DIFFICULTIES, FOR ALL THE DISTRACTIONS AND DIVERSIONS WE HAVE FACED IN THIS PLACE AND OUTSIDE, FOR ALL THE PROPAGANDA OF OUR OPPONENTS, FOR ALL THE OBSTRUCTION OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT AND VESTED INTERESTS, FOR ALL THE DENIGRATION OF THE PRESS, THIS HAS BEEN A PERIOD OF GREAT AND POSITIVE ACHIEVEMENT BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT. THIS IS VERY MUCH A TIME TO KEEP THOSE ACHIEVEMENTS IN MIND, TO PUT THE RECORD IN PERSPECTIVE, TO REFLECT ON THE BASIC STRENGTH AND PROSPERITY OF THE NATION, THE UNDERLYING STRENGTH OF THE ECONOMY, THE REAL GAINS WE HAVE MADE IN SOCIAL REFORM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE AND IN THE LIVING STANDARDS OF THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE.

THE LAST SIX MONTHS HAVE CERTAINLY NOT BEEN EASY. WHEN HAS THERE BEEN A TIME WHEN THE TASK OF GOVERNMENT WAS EASY? WHERE IS THERE A COUNTRY WHERE GOVERNMENT IS EASY? WE BEGAN THE YEAR IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE DARWIN CYCLONE - THE GREATEST NATURAL DISASTER AUSTRALIA HAS KNOWN. IT WAS FOLLOWED BY A SECOND CALAMITY IN HOBART INVOLVING APPALLING SOCIAL DISRUPTION AND LOSS OF LIFE. THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THESE CALAMITIES WAS PROMPT AND GENEROUS. I KNOW THAT ALL HONOURABLE MEMBERS WILL JOIN ME IN A TRIBUTE TO THE NATURAL DISASTER ORGANISATION FOR ITS HANDLING OF THE DARWIN CRISIS, AND TO THE DARWIN PEOPLE THEMSELVES FOR THEIR FORTITUDE AND UNDAUNTED SPIRIT. WE IMMEDIATELY ESTABLISHED A DARWIN RECONSTRUCTION COMMISSION AND ENTRUSTED IT WITH THE MASSIVE TASK OF REBUILDING THE CITY. WE AGREED TO ESTABLISH A JOINT TASMAN BRIDGE RESTORATION COMMISSION. WE HAVE COMMITTED MORE THAN \$58 MILLION TO THE DARWIN RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM AND AN INITIAL GRANT OF \$6 MILLION FOR HOBART. I NEED HARDLY STRESS THAT IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC DIFFICULTY, DISASTERS OF THIS MAGNITUDE PLACE NEW AND UNPRECEDENTED DEMANDS ON THE NATION'S MATERIAL AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES. UNSTINTING AND UNQUESTIONING THOUGH OUR RESPONSE HAS BEEN, THE DARWIN AND HOBART DISASTERS HAVE CERTAINLY NOT MADE IT EASIER TO CONTEND WITH THE ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES FACING AUSTRALIA - DIFFICULTIES WE SHARE WITH ALL OTHER COMPARABLE COUNTRIES.

WE CAN, HOWEVER, TAKE HEART FROM SIGNS OF IMPROVEMENT ALREADY APPARENT IN THE ECONOMY. OF COURSE IT'S NOT A TIME FOR COMPLACENCY; THERE IS STILL A NEED FOR STEADY JUDGMENT AND A CALM, RATIONAL APPROACH TO OUR DIFFICULTIES. BUT THERE IS GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT A RECOVERY IS UNDERWAY. CONSUMER CONFIDENCE, REFLECTED IN RISING RETAIL SALES AND HIGHER DISPOSABLE INCOMES, HAS SHOWN SIGNIFICANT GAINS. PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN THE BASIC AREAS OF THE ECONOMY IS RISING. THE IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES HAVE PUT MONEY IN THE POCKETS OF AUSTRALIANS. PEOPLE ARE MORE PROSPEROUS TODAY THAN THEY HAVE EVER BEEN.

WHENEVER WE HEAR CRITICISM OF THIS GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES REMEMBER THIS SIMPLE FACT: THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE HAVE NEVER BEEN BETTER OFF - BETTER OFF IN THE MONEY THEY HAVE TO SPEND, BETTER OFF IN THEIR REAL INCOMES, BETTER OFF IN THE RANGE OF SERVICES AND OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO THEM FROM THIS GOVERNMENT'S AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS. SINCE DECEMBER 1972 INCOMES OF WAGE AND SALARY EARNERS HAVE GROWN MUCH FASTER THAN THE COST OF LIVING. AVERAGE MINIMUM WEEKLY AWARD RATES FOR MEN HAVE INCREASED BY 53 PER CENT; FOR WOMEN BY NO LESS THAN 75 PER CENT. REAL AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS AFTER TAX FOR ALL WAGE AND SALARY EARNERS HAVE INCREASED BY 7.3 PER CENT SINCE THIS GOVERNMENT CAME TO OFFICE. IN ADDITION, WE HAVE TACKLED THE GREAT AND DIFFICULT PROBLEM OF WAGE INDEXATION. IN ITS HISTORIC JUDGMENT OF 30 APRIL THE CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION COMMISSION ACCEPTED THE GOVERNMENT'S CASE FOR A RESTORATION OF QUARTERLY COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENTS. WITH REASON AND GOODWILL WE CAN MAKE THIS REFORM WORK.

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PROPERLY APPLIED, IT CAN BRING GREATER BENEFITS AND GREATER MATERIAL SECURITY TO ALL WAGE EARNERS AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE SOLUTION OF OUR LONG-TERM ECONOMIC PROBLEMS.

FOR ALL THAT, WE DO NOT SEE REAL LIVING STANDARDS SOLELY IN MONEY TERMS. WE HAVE NEVER DONE SO. THE REAL PROSPERITY OF THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE LIES INCREASINGLY IN THE QUALITY OF THE SERVICES GOVERNMENTS PROVIDE FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY. THAT HIGHER ORDER OF PROSPERITY - THAT WIDER AND DEEPER COMMITMENT TO THE PEOPLE'S GOOD - DEPENDS ON THE SUCCESS OF OUR SOCIAL PROGRAMS. MY GOVERNMENT HAS GIVEN PRIMACY TO THIS PARLIAMENT AS THE CHIEF INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL REFORM. OUR PROGRAMS ARE ESSENTIALLY LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMS; THE MEASURE OF THEIR SCOPE AND IMPORTANCE CAN BE SEEN IN THE NUMBER OF BILLS PASSED THROUGH THIS PARLIAMENT. OUR LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM IN OUR FIRST TWO YEARS SURPASSED ALL RECORDS SINCE FEDERATION - 254 BILLS INTRODUCED IN 1973, 229 IN 1974. SO FAR THIS YEAR, TO THE CLOSE OF BUSINESS LAST NIGHT, PARLIAMENT HAS SAT FOR 421 HOURS AND A TOTAL OF 126 BILLS HAS BEEN INTRODUCED. IT IS A FORMIDABLE ACHIEVEMENT. I THINK IT PROPER TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE OPPOSITION, UNDER ITS NEW LEADERSHIP, HAS BEHAVED WITH GREATER DECORUM IN THIS PARLIAMENT THAN PREVIOUSLY. THIS HAS CERTAINLY MEANT A MORE RATIONAL AND MORE ORDERLY DESPATCH OF BUSINESS. IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE OPPOSITION HAS ABANDONED ITS TACTICS OF OBSTRUCTION. IT DOES MEAN THAT THE PROCEEDINGS OF THIS HOUSE HAVE BEEN LESS DEMEANING TO THE REPUTATION OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY.

WE HAVE SEEN THIS YEAR A NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS BROUGHT TO FRUITION. OTHERS HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO THE POINT OF IMPLEMENTATION. THEIR BENEFITS WILL SOON BE FLOWING TO THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE AND THE PARTICULAR GROUPS WHO NEED THEM - THE LOW-INCOME EARNERS, THE CHILDREN, THE SICK, THE HANDICAPPED. RADICAL AND ENDURING SOCIAL REFORM IS NOT ACHIEVED OVERNIGHT; IT IS NOT ACHIEVED BY SPENDING MORE MONEY, THOUGH MONEY IS CERTAINLY NEEDED. IT REQUIRES NEW INSTITUTIONS, NEW SCALES AND PRIORITIES, NEW SOCIAL ATTITUDES, NEW POLITICAL GUIDELINES, NEW EFFORTS AT CO-OPERATION, NEW MEN AND WOMEN IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY. THIS PROCESS CAN BE DIFFICULT AND PAINFULLY PROTRACTED, BUT EVENTUALLY THE RESULTS WILL SHOW. WE HAVE SEEN IT IN THE CREATION OF MEDIBANK, NOW THE LAW OF THE LAND, A GREAT PIONEERING REFORM WHICH THE RELUCTANT STATES HAVE BEEN DRIVEN INEXORABLY TO ACCEPT, BECAUSE THEY KNOW THAT THEY THEMSELVES WILL BENEFIT AND ABOVE ALL THAT THE PEOPLE WILL BENEFIT. WHAT A LESSON OUR OPPONENTS HAVE LEARNED! AFTER ALL THE OBSTRUCTION IN THIS PARLIAMENT, AFTER ALL THE ATTEMPTS TO DELAY THE MEDIBANK BILLS - NOT JUST THE BASIC LEGISLATION WHICH THE PEOPLE SPECIFICALLY ENDORSED, BUT THE ANCILLARY BILLS TO ESTABLISH AND FINANCE THE PROGRAM - THE ANTI-LABOR STATES ARE NOW SEEKING TO JOIN THE MEDIBANK SCHEME, AND IF THEIR ADVERTISEMENTS CAN BE BELIEVED, EVEN TAKING SOME OF THE CREDIT FOR IT.

ONE OF THE THEMES OF ALL OUR REFORMS HAS BEEN TO ASSERT THE PRINCIPLE OF COMPETITION - FREE AND FAIR COMPETITION IN A MIXED ECONOMY, PRODUCTIVE COMPETITION BETWEEN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ENTERPRISE. WE HAVE SEEN THE BENEFITS OF SUCH COMPETITION IN THE AIRLINES AND THE BANKS. WE SHALL EXTEND IT TO OTHER FIELDS. IN THE FACE OF AN UNSCRUPULOUS AND CONTINUING CAMPAIGN OF MISREPRESENTATION, WE HAVE PASSED LEGISLATION IN THIS HOUSE TO ESTABLISH AN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INSURANCE CORPORATION. IT WILL PROVIDE THE WIDEST POSSIBLE COVER FOR HOMES AT THE LOWEST POSSIBLE PREMIUMS AND OFFER A WIDE RANGE OF INSURANCE SERVICES. WHAT PUBLIC INITIATIVE CAN ACHIEVE IN HEALTH INSURANCE IT CAN ACHIEVE IN FAIR COMPETITION IN GENERAL INSURANCE.

WE HAVE DEVELOPED AND EXTENDED OUR LEGAL AID SERVICE. SIX REGIONAL OFFICES OF THE AUSTRALIAN LEGAL AID OFFICE HAVE BEEN OPENED THIS YEAR AND MORE THAN 60,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ASSISTED. WE HAVE SET UP AN AUSTRALIAN HOUSING CORPORATION TO TAKE ACTION IN AREAS WHERE THE EXISTING HOUSING SYSTEM IS UNABLE TO MEET EXISTING HOUSING NEEDS; ALREADY THIS YEAR WE HAVE FUNDED THE CONSTRUCTION BY STATE HOUSING AUTHORITIES OF 13,580 HOMES FOR LOW-INCOME EARNERS - 5,000 MORE THAN THE NUMBER BUILT IN 1973-74. WE HAVE ESTABLISHED THE AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION TO PROMOTE LOCAL FILM PRODUCTION. THESE ARE ALL AREAS - HOUSING, MEDIBANK, GENERAL INSURANCE, LEGAL AID, FILM PRODUCTION - WHERE EXISTING SERVICES HAVE FAILED TO MEET DEMONSTRABLE HUMAN OR SOCIAL NEEDS, OR WHERE COMPETITION IS LIKELY TO BRING NEW BENEFITS TO THE CONSUMER.

LET ME GIVE A FURTHER EXAMPLE - IN A FIELD WHERE PROGRESS THIS YEAR HAS BEEN REMARKABLE. I REFER TO TRANSPORT. IN MY LAST STATEMENT OF THIS KIND I MENTIONED OUR MASSIVE CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL AND URBAN ROADS PROGRAMS. THOSE PROGRAMS ARE WELL IN HAND. THE OUTSTANDING AREA OF PROGRESS THIS YEAR, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN THE RAILWAYS. SUBURBAN COMMUTERS, IN SYDNEY ESPECIALLY, MAY WONDER AT THAT STATEMENT. THEIR OVERCROWDED AND INCREASINGLY INADEQUATE RAIL SERVICES CONTINUE TO DECLINE IN FREQUENCY AND QUALITY WHILE THE STATES REFUSE OUR OFFERS, REPEATEDLY MADE, TO ASSUME FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR RAIL SYSTEMS AND RAISE THEIR PRESENT ATROCIOUS STANDARDS. BUT IN THE AREA OF NATIONAL RAILWAYS WE HAVE SEEN GREAT AND PERMANENT DEVELOPMENT.

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MORE THAN ANY OF ITS PREDECESSORS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS RECOGNISED THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL APPROACH TO RAILWAYS. WE HAVE RECOGNISED THAT THE RAILWAYS CANNOT EFFECTIVELY SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS WITHIN THE PRESENT FRAGMENTED SYSTEM. IT WAS THIS RECOGNITION THAT PROMPTED MY OFFER IN MY 1972 POLICY SPEECH TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RAILWAYS OF ANY STATES PREPARED TO TRANSFER THEM. DURING THIS SESSION THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS COMMISSION BILL, THE RAILWAYS (SOUTH AUSTRALIA) BILL AND THE RAILWAYS (TASMANIA) BILL HAVE BEEN PASSED. FOLLOWING APPROPRIATE LEGISLATION IN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AND TASMANIAN PARLIAMENTS THEY WILL ALLOW THE TRANSFER OF THE NON-METROPOLITAN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AND THE TASMANIAN RAILWAYS TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT. THIS IS THE FIRST MAJOR STEP TOWARD THE CREATION OF A TRULY NATIONAL RAILWAY. THE ANR WILL HAVE THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONAL POWERS NECESSARY TO CONSOLIDATE INTO A SINGLE SYSTEM THE COMMONWEALTH RAILWAYS AND THE TRANSFERRED STATE RAILWAYS.



WE HAVE DONE MUCH TO RELIEVE THE SHORT-TERM PROBLEMS OF RAILWAYS. THERE IS A DESPERATE LACK OF MODERN INTERSYSTEM ROLLING STOCK. WE HAVE INSTITUTED A PROGRAM TO PURCHASE MODERN HIGH-SPEED WAGONS WHICH WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR LEASE TO THE STATES. THIS PROGRAM PROVIDES FOR THE PURCHASE OF 1,300 WAGONS OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS. CONTRACTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN LET FOR THE FIRST ORDER FOR 500 WAGONS; TENDER DOCUMENTS ARE BEING PREPARED FOR AN ADDITIONAL 800 VEHICLES. AND FINALLY, TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF MOULDING A TRULY NATIONAL TRANSPORT SYSTEM - INCLUDING THE RAILWAYS AND OTHER FORMS OF TRANSPORT - WE HAVE SOUGHT TO RESTORE THE INTER-STATE COMMISSION SPECIFIED IN SECTION 101 OF THE CONSTITUTION.

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TWO OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PRESENT SESSION REFLECT SOMETHING OF THE GOVERNMENT'S FUNDAMENTAL SOCIAL AND HUMAN PRIORITIES. THE FAMILY LAW BILL - A MONUMENT TO THE FORMER ATTORNEY-GENERAL, NOW MR JUSTICE MURPHY - HAS COMPLETELY REFURBISHED THE MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE LAWS OF AUSTRALIA AND DONE AWAY WITH THE MEDIEVAL CONCEPTS OF GUILT AND FAULT. THE BILL HAS ESTABLISHED A FAMILY COURT OF AUSTRALIA WHICH WILL EXPLORE METHODS OF RECONCILIATION AND PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF ALL PARTIES IN DIVORCE PROCEEDINGS IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF DIGNITY AND HUMANITY. THIS WAS A MAJOR SOCIAL REFORM. I AM PROUD THAT IT WAS BROUGHT FORWARD UNDER THIS GOVERNMENT. IN THE SAME SPIRIT WE INTRODUCED LEGISLATION TO ESTABLISH A CHILDREN'S COMMISSION. THAT LEGISLATION HAS NOW PASSED BOTH HOUSES. THE COMMISSION WILL ADMINISTER A COMPREHENSIVE RANGE OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN - PRE-SCHOOL, DAY CARE, PART-TIME AND EMERGENCY CARE SERVICES, AFTER SCHOOL AND HOLIDAY PROJECTS. APPROXIMATELY 165,000 CHILDREN HAVE BEEN CATERED FOR UNDER THIS NEW PROGRAM.

THE DOCUMENTS I SHALL PRESENTLY TABLE - AND SEEK LEAVE TO INCORPORATE IN HANSARD SET OUT THE FULL SCOPE AND DETAIL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE PAST SIX MONTHS. THAT RECORD SPEAKS FOR ITSELF. WHAT IT DOES NOT CONVEY IS THE TRUE NATURE OF THE OPPOSITION'S BEHAVIOUR IN THIS PERIOD. IT WOULD BE PLEASING TO BE ABLE TO REPORT THAT THE OPPOSITION'S NEW DECORUM IN THIS PLACE HAS BEEN MATCHED BY SANER AND MORE CONCILIATORY ATTITUDES TO THE GOVERNMENT'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM. WE HAVE HAD NOTHING OF THE SORT. BEHIND THE FACADE OF REASON AND RESPONSIBILITY THE FAMILIAR CAMPAIGN OF OBSTRUCTION HAS CONTINUED. OUR OVERDUE REDISTRIBUTION PROPOSALS, OUR BILL TO MODERNISE AND SIMPLIFY THE ELECTORAL LAWS, OUR BILLS TO ABOLISH APPEALS TO THE PRIVY COUNCIL, TO ESTABLISH A SUPERIOR COURT OF AUSTRALIA, TO DEAL WITH LURKS AND MALPRACTICE IN THE SECURITIES INDUSTRY, TO ESTABLISH A GOVERNMENT PURCHASING COMMISSION, TO PROVIDE SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS FOR THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - ALL THESE HAVE BEEN REJECTED OR DELAYED OR UNACCEPTABLY AMENDED IN THE SENATE. AND OF COURSE THE CAMPAIGN OF OBSTRUCTION HAS BEEN PURSUED BEYOND THIS PARLIAMENT IN THE COURTS AND IN THE STATES. ONCE AGAIN WE SAW THE FLAUNTING OF AN ESTABLISHED CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION WHEN THE N.S.W. GOVERNMENT REFUSED TO APPOINT A SENATOR OF THE GOVERNMENT PARTY TO FILL THE VACANCY CAUSED BY SENATOR MURPHY'S RESIGNATION.

WE HAVE SEEN THE SAME STATE GOVERNMENT PURSUE ITS PELLIFOGGING TACTICS IN BLOCKING APPOINTMENTS TO FEDERAL BODIES AND REFUSING TO CO-OPERATE IN SUCH THINGS AS A SOIL CONSERVATION PROGRAM. WE HAVE SEEN OUR LEGISLATION PERSISTENTLY CHALLENGED IN THE COURTS - ESPECIALLY THOSE PARTS OF IT MOST LIKELY TO BENEFIT THE WEAK, THE UNORGANISED, THE UNREPRESENTED SECTIONS OF SOCIETY.

I LEAVE THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE TO JUDGE THESE TACTICS FOR THEMSELVES. THEY WILL NOT DETER US FROM OUR GOALS. THE PAST SIX MONTHS HAVE SHOWN WHAT A DETERMINED GOVERNMENT CAN ACHIEVE IN THE FACE OF SENSELESS AND SUSTAINED OBSTRUCTION. DESPITE OUR DIFFICULTIES IN THE SENATE, DESPITE THE BLIND UNREASON OF THE ANTI-LABOR STATES, DESPITE THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WITH WHICH EVERY NATION HAS TO CONTEND, WE HAVE BROUGHT NEW AND PERMANENT REFORMS TO THE STATUTE BOOKS OF THE NATION; WE HAVE CONTINUED TO ENHANCE AUSTRALIA'S STANDING IN THE WORLD; WE HAVE PRODUCED A SOCIETY WHICH HAS NEVER ENJOYED GREATER INDIVIDUAL PROSPERITY, GREATER OPPORTUNITIES OR GREATER PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE.

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