

PRESS STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER

MR E.G. WHITLAN Q.C. M.P.

LAUNCESTON 23 JUNE 1975

THE NATIONAL ISSUE MR FRASER IGNORES

The Leader of the Opposition has asserted the national significance of the Bass by-election - but only in general, hypothetical terms. I agree that the electors of Bass have an opportunity to express a view on a range of national policies and national issues. They are not general or hypothetical. They are specific issues which directly affect the well-being of Tasmania, not least the electorate of Bass and the welfare of all the people living here.

These issues were brought into sharp focus by last week's Premiers' Conference and related events on the mainland. Those events raise issues which Mr Fraser can no longer sidestep or ignore. They are central to this by-election, because they are central to the whole question of good government of Australia.

For the first time since Federation, arrangements between the Federal and Tasmanian Governments have enabled Tasmania to provide standards and services equal to those of the larger States.

The approach of the Australian Labor Government is that through new co-operative arrangements between the Australian Government and the State Governments, we shall be able to provide equality of standards, equality of services, equality between States, and equality between regions within the States.

In pursuit of this objective, there are now over fifty programs for which the Australian Government makes specific purpose payments to Tasmania. For these, some \$115 million is provided in the current year. For specific purposes alone, the per capita payment to Tasmania in 1974/75 was \$284 compared with the national average of \$220.

The biggest burden on all State budgets have been schools, hospitals and railways.

As Minister for Education and Science in the McMahon Government, Mr Fraser was the foremost opponent of our proposal for a Schools Commission, the establishment of which has transformed the outlook and opportunities for education in this country. He opposed it on the grounds of centralism - precisely the same ground on which the Liberals now oppose our proposals regarding hospitals and railways. Yet would any Liberal, any State Premier, or even Mr Fraser himself, now seek to dismantle our education program?

Right up to the deadline - or beyond - the Liberals stalled on Medibank, in the Senate and in their States. Now, the action of the Legislative Council of South Australia, the most unrepresentative and undemocratic legislative chamber in any parliamentary system in the world, in rejecting the agreement between the Federal Government and the South Australian government for the transfer of the South Australian railway system, manifests in its grossest form the obstructionism and negativism of the Liberal approach wherever their numbers enable them to act.

We can only judge how the Liberals would act by their performance in the Senate, the States where they hold power, and now, so blatantly and destructively, in the Upper House in South Australia.

Co-operation between the Australian and Tasmanian Labor Governments on Federal-State financial relations, on Medibank, on the transfer of railways, will place Tasmania's finances on a permanently sound foundation.

All this is placed in jeopardy by Liberal obstruction.

The contrast between Liberal obstructionism and Labor's efforts to find co-operative, constructive solutions is the real national issue which Mr Fraser can no longer ignore.
