

Mr. Jones



PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORAL TALK

Australians everywhere - in cities, rural townships and small farming communities - are fully aware of our national problems.

Australians, I believe, also know of the Government's pledge to overcome these problems and are looking confidently to the future.

Our policies that aim to get Australia on its feet again have been clearly mapped out and spelled out to every segment of Australian society.

But because of our seeming single minded occupation with inflation, budget deficits, stimulation of consumer spending and investment in the private sector many people are unaware of our work in political, legal and social reform.

The Liberal Party is part of a tradition that has always believed in progressive reform.

This tradition achieved the secret ballot; the factory acts which helped secure decent working conditions for Australians; the ending of convict transportation; the system of tariff protection; and the concept of a fair wage and the arbitration system which is the envy of the Western World.

Today, the Liberal National Country Party Coalition is continuing with reform programmes.

These programmes differ from the so-called reforms of the previous Government in many ways - and I will touch on this later.

One of our most important contributions to social reform in the area of the rights of citizens in relation to decisions of government officials.

We are concerned that people directly affected by the decisions of officials should have proper and adequate rights of appeal and recourse.

To this end, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal will be brought into operation later this year.

This Tribunal will provide individuals with two specific safeguards. First it will provide a totally independent review of the way in which Ministerial and official discretions are used. It will also deal with appeals against administrative decisions on as wide a basis as possible. In other words, this will be a citizens tribunal.

Another social reform that concerns the individual rights of all men and women is the creation of a federal Ombudsman.

When in Opposition, we supported this concept. The Ombudsman legislation lapsed when the national Parliament dissolved late last year, and we are now in the process of reviewing that legislation.

The task of the Ombudsman would be to investigate complaints or to initiate enquiries concerning administrative actions of Federal departments and authorities.

I believe that provision could be made for the Ombudsman to report direct to the Prime Minister in some circumstances. This could happen if the Ombudsman believed that his recommendations had not been adequately carried out by the body concerned.

Because of the growing complexity of Government - and because of lack of information for some disadvantaged groups and migrants - many people are unaware of how to get redress when problems do occur. Clearly, this makes the appointment of an Ombudsman all the more important.

Alongside specific measures we have taken to slow down the growth of bureaucracy we are equally determined that people are not unjustly treated as a result of bureaucratic decisions.

Both the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the Ombudsman will be significant steps towards that objective.

Taking this a step further - problems of securing protection for individual arise for the poor and disadvantaged in particular.

We believe that no one must be denied justice because of their economic position.

The Attorney-General is at present reviewing the legal aid situation to determine the most efficient, economical and simple system of distributing this aid.

It is worth noting that in some areas the current legal rights of some groups should be increased by new legislation. Land rights for aboriginals is such a case. Cabinet will shortly discuss details and legislation will be introduced in the national Parliament after a thorough liaison with all the people it affects.

I said earlier that our reforms differed from those of our predecessors in many ways. Surely the first rule of any reform is that the costs should not outweigh the benefits.

Unlike Labor, we believe that the pure act of spending money on welfare programmes is imply not good enough.

It is clear that a very large number of problems which trouble Australians cannot be solved simply by spending more money. This is because they are not financial problems. They are problems of human relations, of organisation and approach.

Assistance should be provided in a way that helps people to be independent - not dependent on Government.

Government assistance should not feed dependence but as far as possible expand people's capacity to meet their families needs as they see fit.

Unfortunately, over the last couple of years some of the weakest sections of the Australian community have suffered most as a result of the failure to see Government spending as being only one element in a programme of responsible and progressive reform.

This Government strongly believes that assistance for the disadvantaged and needy will be effective only in an economic climate where inflation is controlled and where the nation can afford the bill.

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