



PRIME MINISTER

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ADDRESS AT HOBART CAMPAIGN LUNCHEON

I should begin by saying something about the air controllers strike which has so gravely harmed Tasmania over the last weeks, the most recent of a number of irresponsible strikes that have completely disregarded the hardship that they imposed on large sections of the Australian community.

A large number of people have been harmed by the air controllers strike, because of school holidays, Australians overseas who had planned on returning to Australia, and the normal travelling public. The air life-lines of our nation are being stifled by a few selfish men who are trying to circumvent the accepted procedures for settling disputes in this country.

Australians are sick and tired of small, affluent and powerful minorities using industrial muscle in the attempt to impose their will on the whole community, and this is precisely the trend which the air controllers strike exemplifies.

The air controllers make twice as much money as the average Australian and they are now demanding a 36% increase. Perhaps they think that this is modest compared to their initial demand of 76%.

By their actions these few men are posing the most direct possible threat to the jobs of over 30,000 Australians. The Australian public will no longer tolerate a continuance of this sort of disruptive strike, and neither will the Australian Government.

The air controllers strike, with all its selfishness, with all its disregard for the interests of the overwhelming majority of other Australians, is the strongest possible argument for the Industrial Relations Bureau legislation that the Government will soon be bringing down.

We are now all coming to realise that every encroachment on the well-established procedures for settling disputes only leads to further encroachments. Powerful vested interest groups must realise that we are living in a civilised community - one in which there are rights and obligations, not a jungle in which the most intransigent get their own way no matter what the cost to others.

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I make one final appeal to the air controllers. End the hardship and misery being caused to tens of thousands. Return to work and let the highest arbitral tribunal in the land assess the merits of the case.

The air controllers have nothing to fear - if their case has merit, the full bench of the Arbitration Commission no doubt will recognise it. Let all parties accept the verdict of the full bench, and resolve this dispute by reasoned argument, not by coercion.

Any decision which is made by the full bench will be supported by the Government with all the powers available to it. This strike, like so many strikes in recent years, has emphasised that Tasmanian industry and Tasmanian people, do have special problems. Problems arising from the costliness and vulnerability of communications with other states. I can assure you that the Government is well aware of your special position, and the policies we have initiated in the first eighteen months of office amply demonstrate this awareness.

We have decided to relocate the Antarctic division at Kingston, involving an investment of over \$7 million and the transfer here of over one hundred permanent positions. The Secretariat of the Advisory Council on inter-governmental relations will be established in Hobart this year, emphasising our concern to protect the interests of the smaller states in our federal system.

To enable Tasmanian business to compete more favourably on interstate markets, we have introduced a freight equalisation scheme, which this year will involve a total subsidy of about \$16. We have authorised the importation of four aircraft for the Tasmanian air freight trade. Two of these are for a new service to be operated by IPEC, which, subject to a High Court challenge which has been made, will provide considerable extra capacity for the Bass Strait route.

As a result of our concern for the unique problems of Tasmanian industry, an inquiry commenced last December under Sir Bede Callaghan into the structure of Tasmanian industry and development. I expect to receive an interim report within the next few weeks.

Other measures which we have introduced specifically to assist Tasmania have included a grant to assist the establishment and management of the internationally acclaimed South West National Park, the payment of some \$36 million to restore the Tasman bridge and related works, continued support for the Apple and Pear Stabilisation Scheme at a cost of over \$3 million this financial year, and the establishment of the Australian Maritime College. These programmes taken together provide ample proof that the confidence which Tasmanians showed in us at the last election - when for the first time in memory every electorate returned a Liberal Member - was not misplaced.

I would now like to turn to the referendums which Australians will be voting on in ten days time. It is important that we talk about this because the success of the referendums will make a major contribution to the constitutional development of our country.

The four constitutional referendums propose fair, sensible and just changes to reform the constitution, and I am sure they will be successful. In the past, people have tended to vote No on constitutional questions. But these referendums are different. They do not seek more power for politicians. They do not seek more power for Canberra. They do not weaken the states. These referendums meet all the requirements Australians have set for constitutional change.

/The proposals

The proposals have been carefully considered. The principles of all four referendums were adopted overwhelmingly at the Constitutional Convention - here in Hobart - last year, which included representatives of the Commonwealth, all the states, local government and all the major parties. The changes are supported on a bi-partisan basis by all the major federal parties. Each of the four proposals passed in the House of Representatives without a single dissenting voice, and all were supported by all five Tasmanian Members - Michael Hodgman, Ray Groom, Bruce Goodluck, Kevin Newman and Max Burr. Each was passed by an overwhelming majority in the Senate, including support for all four proposals from Senator Brian Archer of Tasmania.

Putting the four proposals forward is evidence of our concern to make necessary constitutional reforms, and of our support for the Constitutional Convention which was initiated, and this should be emphasised, by the states.

The four changes are these. First, that elections for the Senate and House of Representatives should be held simultaneously. It is simply common sense that elections always be held at the same time, and that the only time you have to vote in a federal election is when you have to choose Australia's Government. This proposal means we will not have to vote in as many federal elections. Otherwise we could have as many as four elections in the next four years. Simultaneous elections also protect the smaller states like Tasmania. When there are separate elections for the House of Representatives, political leaders will be tempted to confine their campaign to New South Wales and Victoria which have over 60% of the seats. But if there is at the same time an election for the Senate, in which all states are equally represented, the campaign must be extended with vigour to all states.

It is sometimes said that simultaneous elections can be achieved by bringing the House of Representatives election forward to coincide with that of the Senate. Unless the constitution is changed, the only way to bring the elections together would be repeatedly to cut short the term of the House of Representatives. The three year term is however already relatively short, one of the shortest parliamentary terms in the democratic world. Further reducing it would damage good government. Most importantly, this proposal will maintain and strengthen the Senate and its capacity to protect the states. If this proposal is not passed, the future of the Senate will ultimately be put in jeopardy.

It was an accident that in 1975 there were bills enabling the Governor General to dissolve both Houses and make them both face the people. Had the Senate not been able to face the people themselves, so that their actions might be judged, a number of Senators would not have agreed to block supply. This attitude was soundly based because any House of Parliament that sends another House to the polls while not itself being judged by the people, will not survive. I myself would never have sought the blocking of supply from a Senate that would not itself have also faced the people of Australia. The only way, other than double dissolution, to ensure that the Senate does face the voters is to have a normal half-Senate election, but that can only be held every third year. For two years out of every three, the Senate

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could not, even if it wanted to, face the people to explain and justify its actions. The Senate's powers are great, and anyone who wants them to remain a living reality will campaign for simultaneous elections, and vote for them on Saturday week. For, unless the present system is changed, I can foresee two alternative consequences. The Senate might refuse to check a bad Government unless there happened to exist the circumstances which would permit a double dissolution. Alternatively, if Senators were to make the House of Representatives go to an election without facing the people themselves, then there would be a public outcry against the Senate which could lead to the Senate's powers being restricted or abolished. Either of these alternatives would be bad for democratic government - bad for the states, bad for Australia. That is why it is important that this referendum be passed.

A No vote on May 21 is a vote for the ultimate destruction of the Senate and one of the world's best constitutions.

The second referendum proposal is that whenever a Senator dies or resigns, he will be replaced, for the remainder of his term of office, by a member of the same party. This will guarantee that your choice of parties for the Senate cannot be altered by accident or design. Under the constitution as it now stands, a Senate vacancy can completely change the party balance. It is fundamental to our democracy that only the people should determine the balance of the parties in the Senate. Once this proposal is accepted, the people's choice will be preserved until they have an opportunity to make another choice at the next election.

The third referendum proposal is that voters in the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory should have a vote in all future referendums. This is a fundamental right all other Australians have. I know of no rational or reasonable argument for denying Territorial voters this basic right. Territorial voters have the same obligations as other Australians. They pay taxes, they are obliged to observe the laws of the Commonwealth, they vote for members of parliament, and the outcome of referendums affect them as much as they do other Australians.

The fourth and final referendum proposal is to set a retiring age for federal justices. High Court justices would retire at 70, and the retirement age for other federal court judges would be determined by Parliament. The proposal does not affect the terms of judges already appointed to the bench. Most jobs have retirement ages, and for good reason. Judges are as affected by old age as the rest of us. It is only fair that after the age of 70 responsibility should be handed over to younger people. This is even more important now that the new system of federal family courts has been set up.

All four referendum proposals are fair, just, and reasonable. They meet all the requirements for success. They have been extensively considered. They have the support of all major federal parties. They do not involve more power for Canberra, and they will make our constitution work better.

/The polls

The polls show that all referendums have significant support in all states. But those people who think the referendum propositions should be passed, cannot afford to be complacent. The referendums will not pass themselves.

The proposals were first put forward at the Hobart Constitutional Convention, and in this respect the people of Hobart and Tasmania have a special responsibility to ensure their success.

All people who care about constitutional and political reform in this country have a responsibility to work for the referendums. If we all do this, then the referendums will be passed, and we will have a constitution which serves Australia's needs more effectively.
