



PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

Just a thousand days ago Australians elected the Liberal-National Country Party Coalition to take the reins of Government.

They were heady days, often filled with bitterness and emotion.

The national debate centred on those values and ideals that set us apart from one another. Division - rather than unity - had become part of the fabric of Australian political life.

Although as a nation we still face economic problems, there is today a greater sense of cohesion, a greater purpose throughout the community.

Division still exists, argument still prospers - but without the rage of previous days.

Australians still argue about politics - about politicians and the decisions they make - but they now accept that governments must make unpopular decisions and take unpalatable choices.

They accept that governments cannot rule by popularity polls.

Australians understand that illness of the kind we faced takes time to cure, and that healing is not without pain.

Australians have shown they want a government with a sense of national purpose and a commitment to national unity; they have shown they want a government committed to free enterprise, to achieving and to promoting the growth and development of this nation.

In essence they want a government that gives everyone a fair go - and which is not indebted to any class or any vested interest.

That is what we have striven for, that is what we earnestly seek.

In recent years, the worth of government has tended to be judged almost solely on how successfully it handles economic problems. It is the economy that attracts the headlines, the analysis and constant scrutiny.

In a time of rebuilding and restoring public confidence in a government's ability to come to terms with mainstream issues, that is a fair judgement.

For, without solid foundation - without a sound economy - other initiatives of government eventually do little more than add to community burdens.

While the fight against inflation and restoring the economy to full health has been at the core of our concern, our achievements in welfare and social life, and protection of individuals - to name key areas of human need - have been nonetheless significant.

They stand too as a reminder of the fundamental differences we have with the Labor Party in approach to government.

Our social welfare policies have channelled assistance to those areas of real need.

In this area, where governments have an obligation to provide resources, we have constantly sought to add to - and not subtract from - individual dignity and independence.

We have sought to enhance self-respect and reduce mindless reliance on government to "do it all". And that is one reason why we have striven to encourage the work of voluntary agencies which can provide human understanding and concern so much better than government.

Australia today is at a critical stage in developing a cohesive, united and multi-cultural nation.

Few Australians in their lifetime have to face the same frustrations - the loneliness and anxieties - as the migrant family.

Against that background, the government accepted without reservation the recommendations of the Galbally Report - the most comprehensive review of migrant services and programmes ever undertaken in Australia.

Now government is involved in a new approach to the whole area of English language teaching, communication, information, community services for migrants, ethnic media, consultation and co-ordination.

This period has also marked a real turning point for the Australian Aboriginal.

The core of the Government's policy regarding Aboriginal advancement is summed up in the term 'self-management'.

It was never good enough for politicians and bureaucrats to impose on the Aboriginal people their concept of what was best for the Aboriginal people.

Aboriginals have the same rights as every Australian citizen to determine what is best for them. Pride and self-esteem is not solely the privilege of white Australians.

The setting up of the Council for Aboriginal Development and the National Aboriginal Conference now effectively gives the Aboriginal people new voice, new hope - and helps put an end to the offensive paternalism of past policies.

In the decades since Federation, the bureaucracy has grown enormously in size and power. Many people have felt powerless in the face of the governmental apparatus.

The Government has taken steps to make sure that people dealing with the Government are treated fairly and promptly. We have sought to make sure that discretions are properly used and that grievances against the government are properly and impartially investigated.

The Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the Ombudsman provide legal avenues for the citizen to carry out this process.

The Industrial Relations Bureau also provides protection for individuals against actions of both employers and trade unions.

We are determined that the rights and freedoms of all Australians are not only defended but enhanced and revitalized.

The Government's concern about unemployment - about the social costs of dole queues - is a real concern. The only argument is about approach to solutions.

What we as a government have faced, is that unemployment will not be solved by "one stroke of the pen" policies or by putting people on the Government payroll.

It will only be solved with a fundamentally sound economy, so that private enterprise is encouraged by low inflation and low interest rates - and with incentive from government - to expand and provide new job opportunities.

That is the course we have taken. That is the course we will follow.

In 2½ years we have sought to weld our country with common purpose, common concern. I believe we are succeeding in that.

That is not to say that with hindsight we may have tackled some problems in a different way. I guess hindsight is a valuable ally in all situations throughout life.

However, I believe that our basic approach to solving economic problems, our creative reforms, has been completely right for Australia.

The Government is well aware of the responsibility we hold as we move towards the 80's.

Make no mistake, we have an opportunity to make Australia an example to the world - an example of how determination to overcome basic economic problems can enhance the life of all our people.

We have an opportunity to join that narrow band of countries where decisions are taken because they are right, not because they are thought to be politically popular.

Our purpose is to create an Australia in which every Australian shares in a great national pride.

The opportunities are great - the possibilities exciting.

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