



PRIME MINISTER

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ADDRESS AT YOUNG LIBERALS' CONVENTION, BRISBANE

It is good to be speaking today to young Australians because it is the young of this country who often provide our best and most creative ideas.

Young people will be a vital part of the growth and development of Australia and young Australians have never been better educated, more able to contribute to our society. Australia needs your originality, your enthusiasm, your energy.

This is a time of opportunity for young Australia because the economic strategy we have pursued over the past three years is putting Australia firmly on the road back to economic health. We have reduced inflation to under eight percent. and we are now seeing the benefits of our anti-inflation policies. Business investment has been rising strongly, consumer demand is more buoyant and the rural economy is having its best period for many years. As a result, we expect Australia's overall growth rate for 1979 to exceed the O.E.C.D. average.

The growing competitiveness of Australian industry has been noted in a number of recent economic surveys. One survey last month found that the quarterly rise in manufacturing unit costs was the lowest since December 1969. This is a vital breakthrough in our capacity to export and the same survey showed an upturn in manufacturing export deliveries for the second consecutive quarter for the first time since 1973.

Another encouraging feature of the economy has been the fall in interest rates on bank and building society loans over 1978. Interest rates on the vast majority of home loans fell by one per cent over the last twelve months - a saving to the home buyers of Australia of over \$150 million a year. To businesses, the reduction in bank overdraft rates means significantly lower costs.

One important indicator of Australia's development potential is the many large investment projects where construction is under way or could commence in the next one to two years.

During the last election campaign I said that Australia was ready to go with \$6,000 million worth of investment. Since then, as the latest A.B.S. statistics and surveys indicate, an estimated \$3.4 billion was spent on investment in mining and manufacturing in 1978 - 33 per cent up on the previous year. In addition to that, the latest survey by Phillip Lynch's Department shows that today \$7.5 billion investment projects are ready to go.

Government policies are encouraging and supporting developments in mining and in manufacturing by reducing costs and providing a more stable economic climate, by providing taxation incentives, by promoting exports and research and by helping State authorities to provide essential infrastructure for major resource and other projects.

The Australian Government's energy policies have stimulated the oil and gas industry. In 1978, 52 exploration oil wells were drilled, the highest number of wells drilled for five years and 1979 is expected to be even better. The Government's policies have resulted in a substantial increase in petroleum exploration with minimum expenditure committed for the next five years of over \$500 million.

Our energy policies have given Australia a much better chance to keep its substantial self-sufficiency in oil and develop export markets in gas. It is estimated that by 1985, 30 per cent of Australia's crude oil production will be derived from oil fields which have become viable as a consequence of these policies.

The Government is encouraged by these exciting prospects for Australia. As they are translated into lasting and non-inflationary economic growth, employment will increase, new entrants to the workforce will be absorbed and the numbers of unemployed will be gradually reduced. This is the only way in which unemployment can and will be beaten.

The magnitude of the economic problems we have inherited means that a return to high employment is a slow process and we have responded to this problem by devising a wide range of programmes to help the unemployed. Many of these programmes are especially directed at giving young people training and work experience, at extending their education and making it easier to enter the workforce on a satisfying and permanent basis. Since coming to office, more than 300,000 young people have been helped by such Government programmes. And in December we established the Department of Employment and Youth Affairs to allow a Cabinet Minister, Ian Viner, to concentrate his time and energies on this national problem. Ian has of course, spoken to you earlier in this conference.

A major review of the effectiveness of Government manpower programmes is currently under way and we will continue to search for better ways of helping young Australians. If programmes can be expanded or improved they shall be.

The Government has approved in principle the development of a voluntary youth community service scheme to provide unemployed young people the opportunity to involve themselves in worthwhile community activities and to assist them to acquire work experience and skills.

Later this year, we will be holding a national conference on youth policy bringing together all sections of youth and the community to consider the economic and social issues facing the young, to provide information which will help improve the co-ordination of Government youth policy and suggest ways in which young people can get better access to Government.

Solutions to the problems of young unemployment of course require the cooperation of all members of the community and cooperation between Commonwealth and State Governments.

In December I wrote to the State Premiers suggesting that we together look at possibilities for changes to our education system, covering such matters as alternative secondary school courses more attuned to the needs of early school leavers, courses outside the schooling system for those in the 16 to 18 age group who have already left school and are unemployed, intensive summer holiday courses for school leavers, including labour market information, careers guidance and vocational counselling, and, in the longer term, a review of the whole process of schooling to take account of the rapid changes in our society.

The State Education Ministers have responded to my invitation by forming a working party of senior officials to review what has been done to assist the transition from school to employment and to recommend additional action by both State and Commonwealth Education authorities. I have also invited the States to co-operate in a review to consider whether any of their legislative or institutional arrangements are having an adverse effect on unemployment. For example, inconsistent standards and regulations between the States may affect employment opportunities.

Devising policies to alleviate youth unemployment requires information about the structure of our industry, about the education and training system and about the labour market. The Crawford Inquiry into structural change and the Williams Inquiry into education and training will help to provide this information.

More recently, the Government has taken initiatives to examine other aspects of the labour market by establishing a Committee of Inquiry into the process of technological change in Australian industry. We have also supported a tripartite committee, under the auspices of the National Labour Consultative Council to examine the effects of certain factors - for example penalty rates - on the labour market. In the end, however the solution to the problem of unemployment is strengthening the economy. Additional jobs will be created only if our economy grows faster than it has been. For this to happen the constraints preventing faster growth, such as inflation, the imbalance between wages and productivity and the inadequacy of profits will have to be removed.

The Government's specific measures to alleviate unemployment must be seen in the context of our drive to restore Australia's economic health, to remove the constraints holding back our economic progress and the capacity of private industry to provide employment.

While we have been grappling with the fundamental economic issues facing Australia, we have not been distracted from other major areas of social concern.

We are a Government of social and legislative reform as much as a Government of development and progress. We have the great advantage of a liberal philosophy - a philosophy which allows us to recognise and respond effectively to the goals and aspirations of all Australians.

The Liberal Government knows that young Australians give the highest priority to maintaining a free and open society. The young people of Australia know the importance of individual freedom and the opportunity to make their own way through life, to pursue the livelihood they choose, to express their views, to bring up their families and to live in the way they wish. Like all Australians the young seek a society where the laws of the land are observed, where each citizen has equal access to justice, where individuals are able to exercise their creativity and talents and where there is redress when Governments unfairly or unreasonably interfere with their lives.

In pursuing these goals the Liberal Government for the past three years, has been comprehensively reviewing Government programmes and existing legislation.

Already a good deal has been done.

Our policies have provided effective help for those in need while encouraging self-reliance. They have done a great deal for the less privileged in our society.

We have introduced family allowances; one of the greatest social welfare innovations in Australia's history. We have increased the Government's help for the handicapped. We have helped the aged to live in their own homes and we have helped those requiring special accommodation.

In three years, we have provided a total of \$304 million for aged persons accommodation and home care services, an increase of some 38% over the previous three years.

More than \$80 million of this amount has been directed towards home care services which assist the aged and infirm to remain in the happiness and independence of their own homes - by subsidising home help, home nursing, meals on wheels, senior citizen centres and welfare services. That is an increase in expenditure over the three Labor years of 112%.

We have introduced the indexation of pensions, tax indexation, a fairer means test, revenue sharing with the States, the supporting parents benefit for sole fathers, Aboriginal land rights in the Northern Territory, a new deal for our migrants, self-government for the Northern Territory, three successful Constitutional amendments and abolition of Estate and Gift Duty.

And for rural industry we have introduced the Primary Industry Bank, income equalisation deposits, fuel equalisation, improved tax averaging and many specific programmes supporting Australia's wool, meat, dairy and sugar industries.

Our programme of reform will continue in 1979 and I will give you just some examples. In seeking to play our part in enhancing human rights in Australia, the Government will proceed with a bill to ensure that Commonwealth laws, acts and practices conform with the international covenant on civil and political rights.

The Government is also conducting discussions with the States to achieve a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to protection of human rights throughout Australia.

We propose to bring forward a bill to clarify and define the powers of A.S.I.O. and to establish a security appeals tribunal to provide an avenue of appeal for those affected by an adverse security report. Legislation will be introduced to establish, in co-operation with the States, a new national companies and securities commission and to implement our agreement with the States on jurisdiction over off-shore matters.

The Government has submitted references to the Australian Law Reform Commission on a number of other areas in which reform may be desirable, including insurance contracts, the laws relating to debtors, the incorporation in our legal system of traditional aboriginal law and defamation. The Government will consider these reports as soon as they are completed.

Since coming to office, the Government has also initiated a number of important Parliamentary reforms. The continued effectiveness of Parliament remains one of our strongest guarantees of individual liberty and democratic rule.

We have taken steps to see that the procedures of Parliament keep pace with the increasing complexity of the executive Government. We have introduced legislation committees of the House of Representatives, a House Expenditure Committee, and we are legislating to authorise the Auditor-General to carry out, and report to Parliament on, efficiency audits on Government Departments.

Perhaps, most importantly of all, the Government has undertaken to report to Parliament within six months on the recommendations of Parliamentary Committees.

The Government will continue to review the Parliamentary processes. One matter under consideration is the possibility of the committee stage of the next Budget being carried forward in two or more committees which could sit concurrently, enabling more members to express their views on matters of importance to them.

The Government has acted to protect the citizen against unwarranted interference by the bureaucracy. We have appointed the Ombudsman to investigate complaints, and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal now hears appeals from a wide range of bureaucratic decisions.

We have also passed legislation requiring reasons to be given in writing for many administrative decisions made which affect individual citizens.

Our reform programme has also tackled the difficult area of industrial relations. We know that Australians want a society in which industrial disputes are settled by consultation, reason and free choice by the individuals concerned.

We have gone a long way towards this goal by providing protection for conscientious objectors, and 170 conscientious objectors were registered with the Industrial Relations Bureau in its first year of operation; by introducing secret postal ballots for union elections - more than 360 union elections have been conducted by the Commonwealth Electoral Office during the past 12 months; by requiring unions to have their accounts audited and report regularly to their membership; by establishing the Industrial Relations Bureau and the National Labour Consultative Council.

However, where consultation and conciliation breaks down it is essential that the rule of law should prevail, and we have strengthened our industrial laws accordingly.

Education is a major priority of the Government, as it is of course with all parents and young Australians. The Government is committed to providing a high standard of education, one that will meet the career and social aspirations of young Australians. A great deal has been achieved already.

The Government will examine all the information which becomes available, including the Williams Report, to assist us to upgrade the quality and accessibility of education for all Australians, and to make it more relevant to individual and community needs.

Good health is also one of the first priorities of Australians, whether young or old. The Government is determined that no-one in the community need fear crippling financial costs from illness. At the same time, we believe that individuals should have the responsibility to provide for a part of their health costs. Our health initiatives reflect this philosophy; they give Australians one of the best and most efficient health services in the world.

I believe we are well on the move towards the sort of Australia we all desire; a growing and prosperous country, with progress in both economic and human terms; a more responsible, imaginative, a fairer society.

It is not our role as a Government to direct individuals and dogmatically lay down the goals they should follow. We wish to encourage the people of Australia to use their resources and their talents to the full. Australia needs contributions from all its people, and achieving our goals requires much more than mere lip service to theoretical ideas.

Every Australian must seek to play a positive role in our work, in our relationship with our families, in our dealings with all members of the community so that we can achieve our goals.

Employers can help by providing jobs and, in those cases where they employ young people under a Government youth employment programme, by keep them on when the initial subsidy ceases.

Employers can boost the job satisfaction and productivity of all their staff by actively seeking to make employees aware of the decisions that affect their workplace.

Unions can help by realising that unreasonable wage increases harm the economy and contribute to unemployment.

We can all play our part by working harder, by using our initiative, and by doing so, helping the economy to grow. Another way we all can contribute is by taking an active interest in Government.

The Young Liberals have a special opportunity and responsibility to give us timely and relevant advice, particularly on those issues which most affect young Australians.

Today, we are farewelling a Young Liberal, Dr. Bruce Noble, who has made a major contribution in advising government in his two years of invaluable service as National Young Liberal President. The time he has given to the movement has often meant great personal sacrifices for Bruce and his family, and I thank him warmly for all he has done for the Young Liberals and the help he has given to the Government.

The Government welcomes comments and constructive criticism from all Australians which helps us in developing our programmes and in broadening our understanding of Australians' needs and aspirations.

We seek a partnership between all members of the community, between governments, between employers and employees, between all Australians. With such a partnership and with a determination to make our aspirations a reality there is nothing this country and its people cannot achieve.

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