



FILE

PRIME MINISTER



FOR MEDIA

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OPENING OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE, CANBERRA

I have much pleasure in addressing this the first National Youth Conference. It has been quite a long while in the planning, and I think it really grows out of discussions that have taken place not just over the last year but over a longer period than that. A number of people have put it to me that government's links with young people, with the problems that young people face in a modern community, should be better and more direct than they have been in the past. The Office of Youth Affairs was established, and then the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations was divided, on the one hand so that Tony Street could give his total attention to the very difficult and and intractable problems of industrial relations, but also so that there could be a Minister who could devote his whole energies to the problems of employment and to the problems of youth affairs, expanding the Office of Youth Affairs and enabling it hopefully to carry out a more effective function.

There has been a good deal of interest shown in this conference, not just from youth organisations around the country, but on one particular occasion there were over 20,000 calls from young people around Australia showing an interest in the conference and what it was all about. We welcome that interest very much indeed. The very fact that so much interest has been shown I think indicates that young people in the community are prepared to accept responsibility and certainly want to help in the search for solutions to some of the difficulties that we have at the moment. Amongst all of you here there is a wide cross section - some still at school, some in training, some at work, and some as I am told unemployed at the moment.

I think this gives all of us a unique opportunity to give the Government your analysis, your solutions, your ideas, about the kind of approach that ought to be adopted. I hope that there will be a very useful interchange and exchange of views during the course of the conference, because that is much of what it is all about.

For the next few moments I would like to put out a few ideas, not in any dogmatic way, but maybe offering a challenge, maybe seeking a responsive reaction, to see whether some of the feelings I have are reflected in your own minds. Throughout the conference we would certainly want your input to what happens.

A lot of people have been paying attention to the education system in recent times. The role of the education system is very much under scrutiny, under examination. People are asking how we can widen career opportunities, widen the nature of courses and make them more appropriate to the needs of students in the modern world. I think overall Australia has some reason to be proud of its educational system. In many ways it is central to our achievements. There has been a great growth of universities and colleges, and compared with 10 or 20

years ago more people are staying at secondary school for higher levels of schooling. Because there has been some success that doesn't also mean that there is not a considerable degree of concern as to whether the education system is clearly meeting the needs of all young Australians. It is not just a question of being able to meet the needs of those who are academically orientated - those who might wish and have the intellectual capacity to go to university and to college. There are other people in the community who have different inclinations and different talents, whose needs are just as great, whose talents in some ways might be just as great, but which lie in a different direction. I believe there is a very real question as to whether the education system meets that group of the Australian community as well as it should.

The academic training is obviously suitable for many, but it is not suitable for all. I think in a number of secondary schools there is too much emphasis on academically orientated courses, too much attention to the students who can fit those courses. Maybe that is putting it the wrong way around, maybe it is not too much attention given to those students, but too little attention given to students who don't fit those courses, who don't fit into the academic stream, who need a different kind of training, a different kind of opportunity, more vocationally orientated, more technically orientated. It is not a question of one person being better than another. It is not a question of one educational stream being better than another. I think it is a question of what suits the talents of young Australians and what is going to give people an opportunity to make their own way as they leave school, as they finish formal education.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of a situation in which schools fail a certain group of people within the Australian community is that they get a feeling of inadequacy there, not because they have failed the system, but because the system, the education, the school, has failed them. If they leave school and find it difficult to get a job within a reasonable time, that feeling of inadequacy, that feeling of frustration is clearly compounded, it grows and can lead to real questions as to what it is all about. Is it a reasonable world, or isn't it? I think in these areas, in these issues, there are a number of things that need tackling. Some of the States have started to. There are work experience schemes undertaken by some schools, but I don't think they go far enough. I don't think they reach out to enough students, don't provide enough opportunity, and I doubt very much whether the orientation of many of Australia's secondary schools is appropriate as we approach 1980. I think it needs modification and greater emphasis given in the technical area.

I think nearly everyone here would have been at school more recently than Ian Viner and myself, so I have thrown out some ideas and views, and would certainly welcome your reactions.

Most of those who leave school manage the transition to work or to further study without much difficulty. But 10% of each age group as they leave school find it difficult in getting a job in the course of the following year. I think it is that group - 10% or a bit above - that much of our attention needs to be directed to. They are the ones in greatest difficulty, ones that the present system is not assisting in the way it ought.

I think that we also ought to have in mind that those who hold off getting a job in the hope of getting one that they really want ought to consider the benefits of experience that they would gain in some kind of work, rather than remain an inexperienced unemployed. That is a question that people who have difficulty in getting the job they want I hope would ask themselves.

The Government has for some time been concerned about the problems of transition from school to work. There has been concern about the direction of our education system. We have had the Williams Inquiry, the committee which has reported into education and training. It has reported on the difficulties of school leavers. It has emphasised that there is a greater need for basic skill; it has emphasised the importance of attitudes of students, of schools and of parents; it has emphasised the importance of adequate transition from school to work and arrangements that make that possible; and in particular it has discussed the forms of training that are available and suggested modification and change. It has suggested that there should be further emphasis on technical training and on further education. In recent times we have sought, when we have had additional funds and additional resources, to make sure that they go into technical and further education, believing that that more directly fits the needs of the present time.

We have a wide range of programs that are designed to help the unemployed and young unemployed without skills in particular. The National Employment and Training Scheme, the apprenticeship scheme CRAFT, the Education Program for Unemployed Youth, which I think from some of the classes that I have seen might be giving some people an opportunity in life for the first time. In the classes that I have visited I think, maybe for the first time in their lives, people felt that somebody was concerned, somebody cared about what happened. That again is only touching a relatively small proportion of young people.

The programs are designed to give special training, work experience, to create a greater degree of self-confidence, and by the end of this financial year something over half a million Australians, many of them young Australians, will have been assisted by these various training programs. That is a very substantial number. We are not complacent about it, we are not satisfied with the programs as they are. Ian Viner monitors them, they will be improved as we can, and this again is an area where we would welcome your views about the nature of the various training programs.

For a moment I would like to put some of the problems that Australia faces into the wider international background.

Australia is not an island unto itself. We live in a world, and we need to take account of the world around us. I say it not by any means as an excuse for our own problems. What problems we have we have to tackle, but at the same time we need to understand the kind of world Australia must live in, that Australia must trade in, and sometimes that world assists us, sometimes it makes it more difficult. When it makes it more difficult we just have to be more determined to do things better within this country, not to say everything is against us and give up and say it is too hard. That is a defeatist attitude, which the Government certainly doesn't and never would accept. I believe that most Australians also wouldn't accept it.

There are now complex economic problems, not only in Australia but in many countries. Inflation is too high for many reasons. Governments have had the view that they can spend and just go on spending, meet all needs by if necessary printing funds. That has led, as much as anything else, to inflation being embedded very deeply within many Western societies.

In one sense Australia is fortunate, because here inflation is less than in Northern America, it is less than in many countries in Europe, and very significantly less. But because world inflation is high, the growth of world trade is very low. New investment and development in many countries is very low. In the 20 or 25 years to 1972 world trade grew by about 8% a year. In the years of high inflation since 1972 world trade has grown by only about 4% a year. The difference between those figures, the difference from the growth it represents in different countries, is really represented by the much higher number of unemployed in Australia, in Britain, in the United States, in Europe and many countries around the world.

How therefore do we return to a situation of growth? For so long people in my generation and I think Ian's probably took growth for granted. In the late '40s to '50s and '60s, really up to the end of the 1960s it seemed that growth, relatively low inflation, very high levels of employment, had come to stay, they came to be accepted, and people believed that they could go on regardless and that state just wouldn't change. It came to be accepted as a permanent fact of life. As a result of that people in Australia and again in many other countries began to pursue a whole range of policies that weren't conducive to growth, to development, to investment and therefore to the creation of the kind of jobs and the numbers of jobs that we in Australia and people in other countries needed. A number of policies were pursued by countries which were in a sense anti-growth, anti-development, and anti-jobs. Now, at the end of the 1970's, we seek to grapple with those difficulties, with those problems, and overcome the difficulties of the past. A number of the old theories that people had followed for a long while just don't work in a system where there is high inflation coupled with relatively high unemployment.

It is not possible to spend your way out of difficulty when inflation is high, because the extra spending just compounds inflation. In a sense it is not all that unlike a family that has spent too much over a period of two or three years and might suddenly find itself very much in debt, with the house being mortgaged and a second mortgage. The banker comes along and says if you continue these habits you are going to lose your home and are going to lose all your assets. The family wakes up and decides they can't allow this to happen, they have got to get their spending back into a reasonable pattern and live within their income.

Obviously the analogy is simplified, but there are some similarities and important ones between the resources available to a family and the resources available to a nation. Ultimately both have to live within their incomes within what they can produce.

One of the cruellest things that can be done for the problems of unemployment is to suggest that there are quick, easy solutions. There aren't quick, there aren't easy solutions. The problems are going to take a while to work through, and the solutions have to be real ones. We don't believe, and my Government has never believed, that so-called job creation schemes themselves would work and provide any permanent solution. Certainly it is very easy to put more people on a Government payroll. There was a year once before in Australia when an extra 100,000 in one year went on Government payrolls, but 155,000 lost their jobs in the private sector of the Australian community. That meant in a sense that the additional employment was becoming a very great burden on Australian taxpayers, but even in spite of that not enough people could go on the Government payroll to reduce the numbers unemployed. The number unemployed in fact increased very substantially. It is not much consolation for governments to spend substantial sums on job creation schemes if that reduced investment, reduces development, and thereby leads to less employment overall. That is what it is all about.

Since 1975 we have worked for permanent jobs funded from real growth, real investment, real development throughout the Australian community. Not for something transient or artificial, not for something that will only last for a year or two, but something that will build a basis of scope as we go forward into the 1980's. Now more and more major countries are rejecting the discredited policies that many of them have followed, and more of them are at least coming to accept that the kind of policies pursued by this Government are in fact the only ones that will work in the longer term. That is needed if inflation is to come down, if trade is to grow, and there is to be more activity, not just in Australia but in many other countries.

Of course there are still problems. Our policies are best designed to cope with those problems and in re-establishing the conditions in which there will be investment and development and opportunities. Inflation for some time in Australia has been lower than that in North America, much lower than in Britain, much lower than many countries of Europe, and therefore

our industries have become competitive again. They sell better on the Australian market and overseas. If they are selling better they employ more and produce more. During this period there has been a good deal of technological change and much talk about it. Some people say it is best to put up the shutters against technological change because it tends to reduce the number of jobs. That again is a defeatist attitude and it is not an option I believe that is open to us because our industries depend on being competitive, they depend on being able to do well or better than the same industries in other countries. We are not going to be able to do that with outmoded technology which can either produce a product that is not so good, or if they can produce one that is good they might produce it at considerably higher cost. So new technology is inevitable, we need to embrace it and use it to our advantage. I think that sometimes there needs to be much more discussion with working men and women about the introduction of new technology, the problems of transition as it is introduced into a factory or a particular workplace, but there is no option but to accept the challenges of new technology and see that it is used to Australia's advantage to create more jobs overall rather than less.

The future in the 1980's I believe is one which Australia should face with a great and a growing confidence. The prospects for the 1980's are good. There is more development, more investment taking place in this country now than for a very very long while. There are the possibilities of real reward, for personal efforts of individuals. That is not to say there aren't problems, that is not to say there aren't difficulties, that is not to say there aren't some people - and too many young people - finding it difficult to get the kind of work that is needed and finding it difficult to find their place within the Australian community. But the opportunities are still very great.

We have an unparalleled opportunity to play a role in our own part of the world, in South-east Asia and East Asia, and trade with those regions is going more rapidly than with any other. We are attracting great investment. There will be more resource processing using the great power reserves, the great reserves of coal, which makes us one of the more fortunate of the Western countries.

There are other opportunities for Australia in the cultural and artistic, scientific and sporting fields. As a nation we need to build on all of these to create a better life, a more equal and a more tolerant community. In the international environment, as a middle-ranking power we can act as a force for moderation as we have in many areas, and I think that is a role that Australia ought to play with vigour.

I think there is one sense where I sometimes become very disappointed at the attitudes of Australians in relation to a number of things. It is not by accident, it is not by chance that we sometimes call ourselves a nation of knockers. If somebody does something well there are always

the detractors that want to destroy. How often do we hear people saying "Australia can't do it, that working people in other countries produce something better. That we are not really competitive because our costs are too high. I think it really is time that we put that kind of view behind us, and especially it is time that we put that view behind us because it just doesn't happen to be factually correct. Very often Australians are the greatest detractors of Australia. We need to understand that if we are not going to have some kind of pride in this nation, some kind of pride in where we want to take Australia in partnership, then nobody else will. We are Australia, you are Australia, more your future than mine because you are all a good deal younger than I am. We need to have pride in what we can achieve and in what we have done.

Let me just give one or two examples. Two years ago Jim Killen came to us wanting to order a major defence ship for the Royal Australian Navy. It was going to cost \$70 million or \$80 million. Defence hadn't gone to Australian firms to get Australian prices. The automatic assumption was we couldn't do it in this country, it would cost much too much, subsidy would be enormous. So they had gone around the world and got the best tender from France, the cheapest international tender. As a Government we said that was not good enough. We wanted to see how much more, we assumed it would cost more, how much more it would cost to build that ship in Australia. Maybe we would be prepared to provide the subsidy that is necessary to do it. A few months ago we got the Australian tender from Vickers, and it wasn't a dollar, it wasn't a cent more than the tender. It was some millions of dollars below the cheapest tender overseas. That is an example of Australians doing it. Australian management, Australian initiative, Australian working people being able to produce with the best.

There are other examples where Australian manufacturing industry is producing goods in competition against production from Singapore, from Taiwan and from Hong Kong, and winning contracts around the Indian Ocean and South East Asia because Australians do it better, and they provide a better product, and they can sell against that kind of competition. In other areas, in the mundane area that affects so many of us, how many people say they have to buy an imported car because they are better, they are better produced, they are better finished. It just doesn't happen to be true. A world class product is produced in this country by more than one company, and it is finished just as well as any imported product. It is time I think we began to have some pride in things Australian and in Australian achievements. Because if we don't do that, nobody else will, nobody else can. I don't mean that we should do it in a way that is chauvanistic or bombastic - wearing the Australian flag on both arms all the time - but this is a great nation, and it is up to us to build it for the future. In particular, it is up to people like yourselves I believe to build it for the future, because it depends on what happens as each generation passes, the kind of nation we have, the kind of nation we create.

But whatever we do in material things, I would hope that with the great migration program that has taken place over the last 30 years, above all else we achieve a nation with a growing sense of tolerance, a growing sense of understanding of the different needs and aspirations of different groups of people of different individuals within the Australian community so that this can be truly a land which is the best country in the world to bring up a family, the best country in the world for men and women, young and old, to live out their lives. That is really what it is all about. It is not about power or greatness or physical achievements, but the kind of country where people can lead their lives and the way in which they can do it, giving themselves a sense of satisfaction and a sense of achievement.

Often you get people who want to get to a certain position, and they are not happy unless they are in it. For an individual and for a nation, the way they walk through life I think is infinitely more important than the position they ultimately achieve. The way they walk through life depends upon their relationship with their mates, their friends, the kind of community and friendship and comradeship which has always been so much a part of the Australian tradition. So, Ladies and Gentlemen I have great pleasure in declaring open this first National Youth Conference. We look forward to hearing your views, to hearing your ideas about the future of this nation and the course of direction that Government policy ought to take.

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