



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SATURDAY, 5 JUNE 1982

25TH CONVENTION OF THE TASMANIAN YOUNG LIBERAL MOVEMENT

I am delighted to be with you in Tasmania today - not only as this occasion marks the Young Liberal Movement's first quarter century, but also because this is the first time I have come to Tasmania since your magnificent election victory three weeks ago. That victory, under Robin Gray's leadership, represents a turning point in Tasmanian politics and in the development of this State. It is the first time a Liberal Government has been elected in its own right in Tasmania.

Policies designed to restore confidence and growth to the Tasmanian economy can now be implemented. Efficient procedures for public administration can now come into operation. This State will undoubtedly benefit from having a Liberal Government, pursuing liberal objectives, and acting in the interests of all Tasmanians.

The Young Liberal Movement has a role to play in this, and the standing enjoyed by the Young Liberal Movement within the Liberal Party recognises the important contribution which young people have to make to the affairs of this nation. The constructive achievements of Liberalism grow out of a vision of what Australia can be. It is only through Liberal policies that this vision can be realised. And the greatest contribution of Liberalism to the building of modern Australia has been its ability to define and keep to a role for government which permits the Australian people to express in action their values and their abilities.

The Liberal Party has clearly defined ideals which have their effective expression in the policies we pursue and I want to outline the substance of these ideals, and the

direction in which they are leading Australia. The first ideal is a belief in Australia, in Australians and in what the Australian people can achieve when Government permits them to strive after the things they value, rather than trying to impose some political ideology onto them.

It is impossible to think of a field in which Australians have not recorded outstanding achievement but there is one field where achievement underpins opportunities in most others - the field of economic life. In the last three years Australia has swum against the tide of the world recession our economy has grown, real incomes have grown. This has taken place at a time when a tighter rein has been kept on Government spending in Australia than in probably any other industrial country.

It is of the greatest importance for Australia that the gains we have made should be maintained and strengthened that we should redouble our determination to live within our means as a nation and reject the Labor fantasy that letting spending run out once more will stimulate the economy. Let there be no question about it, the whole thrust of the policies we have put in place have been directed towards putting more real dollars in people's pockets and through the growth that has been achieved. We have already been successful in that.

There may always be a need for adjustments to the details of policy as circumstances vary and the Government takes account of that. As our housing package and other initiatives plainly illustrate for that package, which balances sound economic management with broader social objectives, provides help where help is most needed in support of the great Australian goal of home ownership.

Our overall policy approach has given the Australian economy great underlying strength a massive renovation has been achieved since we came to power in 1975 and the cracks in the foundations repaired. Sound Government has made it possible by unleashing the abilities and enterprise of the Australian people themselves. A second ideal which motivates Liberals is a belief in excellence. We believe it is in the interests of everyone if individuals are encouraged to achieve to their utmost according to their abilities. And we have given high priority to excellence in a number of areas.

We have transferred resources to areas where excellence can be encouraged in the revival of Australian films, in establishing the Institute of Sport, in nearly doubling NHMRC medical research grants in the last two years and in recent grants for centres of excellence in Australian

universities. In addition, we have encouraged people to develop a wide range of abilities to a high level, emphasising the expansion of opportunities for young Australians to acquire the technical and other skills they need to take full advantage of the resurgence of enterprise and development our policies have encouraged. Since 1975, Commonwealth spending on Technical And Further Education and on training schemes has increased by 83.2% in real terms.

A third belief which underlies the policies of modern Liberalism is the belief that the cultural and ethnic diversity of Australia can be a source of great strength and creativity. The ideal of the multicultural society recognises diversity as one of the main supports of the Liberal belief in freedom, and it has been expressed in many ways in our policies through the Galbally programs, which were implemented following our acceptance of the Galbally report in 1978 and which are currently being reviewed to ensure their continuing effectiveness and relevance; through the Institute of Multicultural Affairs, which is helping people understand the value of cultural and ethnic diversity in Australian life; through multicultural television and through immigration from a wider range of countries, including Asian countries.

I believe the scope of our policies in this area is without parallel in the world and Australia is undoubtedly deriving great strength from the rich cultural resources now to be found among the Australian people.

A fourth ideal which has motivated this Government is a strong and safe Australia. Strength and safety are to a significant extent, of course, functions of defence and foreign policy. Our commitment to the Western Alliance, and to the modernisation and build-up of our independent military forces is well known. We are now in the middle of a defence re-equipment program costing more than \$5 billion and we now have, in the words of the recently retired Chief of the Defence Force Staff, the best equipped and best-trained force we have ever had in peacetime.

Our commitment to a safe and secure Australia is linked to a fifth ideal which has motivated the policies of this Government - the ideal of an Australia which can do something positive to help in relieving the terrible conditions of poverty, disease and oppression which exist for hundreds of millions of the world's people.

In recent years Australia has been a leader among industrialised countries in getting a fairer deal for developing countries in world markets. We have been a

leading source of initiatives through the Commonwealth, and our proposals for consideration in the context of the Versailles Summit can be seen as a significant step towards breaking the current global negotiations impasse because of their benefits to developing nations.

In addition to these initiatives, our constant attempts to strengthen human rights and to combat racism has had a great effect in improving and enhancing the view which other nations take of Australia as a concerned and outward-looking nation. Our capacity to help people in other countries as well as at home is very much related to our economic strength. The solution to poverty is not higher taxes and bigger bureaucracy, it is economic growth and a proper concentration of help on those in need.

This brings me to a sixth ideal reflected in the priorities of modern liberalism - the ideal of an Australia where economic strength enables ever improving provision for the disadvantaged and those in need. We are committed to a strong and effective system of social security. It should never be forgotten that Liberalism established the system of federal old age and invalid pensions and in fact social security and welfare spending is the largest single item in our budget, amounting to over \$11 billion.

Despite economic conditions and despite the great increase in social security and welfare spending in the early seventies, we have actually increased the total real level of spending in this area while concentrating assistance more on those in need. Our health scheme provides for free health care for some three million Australians, while giving incentives for those on higher incomes to insure themselves and effective social security and welfare arrangements will always remain one of the top priorities of modern liberalism.

Liberal programs have expressed another ideal which is now added to the list : the ideal of an Australia which is governed in the interests of all, in the public interest, and not on behalf of special interests. The pressure on Government by special interests for privileges is unceasing. Most interests argue, and believe, that they are acting in the public interest but the truth is that they are often acting in their own. Resisting such pressures, which has been closely linked with our success in holding spending in check, has been one of the real achievements of this government and it has also helped to spread a greater sense of realism in the community about what is possible and desirable. Labor is of course particularly vulnerable here, not only because demands for more money and restrictive

regulation are music to its ears but because it is actually the political agent for some of the most extreme trade union interests in the country,

a relationship highlighted here in Tasmania in the last twelve months.

This brings me to another of the ideals we have sought to realise in Government - the ideal of a society in which there is a balance in the power of the large private institutions of business and trade unions in which neither is strong enough to dominate, and in which both are checked by the power of Government, the rights and freedoms of individuals, and their own good sense and co-operative attitudes. Under Labor, government becomes a partisan on behalf of extremists in the trade union movement, supporting massive wage increases and the obstruction of business profits, and granting new legal privileges to the union movement.

The Government believes that the excessive power of left-wing unions relative to other interest groups in Australia was one of the deep-seated sources of cost push inflation in Australia during the 1970's. It is, of course, entirely predictable that Labor as a special interest party has undertaken to repeal much of our industrial legislation, and remove the checks and balances we are building into the system in the public interest.

In the Liberal view it is only under conditions of balance that we will see conflict more often replaced with a spirit of compromise and conciliation. Such a willingness to compromise and co-operate is necessary if, for example, there are to be realistic prospects of extending collective bargaining in Australia. Strengthening the rights of individuals against large organisations - whether business, union or Government - has long been a Liberal ideal - and one which has received the enthusiastic endorsement of Young Liberals.

We have taken a number of historic steps to protect individual rights, including most recently the Human Rights Commission and our Freedom of Information legislation. Our belief in ensuring that rights and freedom are protected, and power is decentralised, has particular bearing on our ideals in relation to the structure of Government itself. Our ideal is Government which is strong, efficient, economical and effective, but not centralised in Canberra; not bureaucratic or domineering.

I mention two of the major ways in which we have given practical expression to this ideal for Government in the last six years.

One is by returning to the States significant independent powers in financial matters, and in the control of offshore lands. Between 1975-76 and 1981-82 the proportion of untied Commonwealth payments to the States has risen from 51% to over 65% and the proportion of total Commonwealth Budget outlays accounted for by untied payments to the States has also risen. The financial interests of all States, including Tasmania, have been protected through these policies.

The other has been through the most extensive ministerial review of the functions of the Commonwealth Government in the history of Australia - the Review of Commonwealth Functions.

The historic commitment of Liberalism to moderate and evolutionary reform has been an essential element in our record of constructive achievement. Liberals build on the achievement of the past, while striving towards ideals yet unrealised. Our approach to constitutional reform is evidence of this and people should not forget that while 7 of the 17 constitutional amendments put before the people by Liberal Governments since Federation have been successful, only one of the 19 amendments put forward by Labor has been accepted by the people.

There is a reason for this contrast. Successful constitutional reform requires that the proposed amendments express or are not obnoxious to, the values of the Australian people. The Australian people value the regime of decentralised Federal Government in our constitution and have rejected again and again Labor's proposals to concentrate more power in Canberra. The present Government has introduced more successful constitutional amendments than any other Government in Australia and we have recently suggested to the States a further session of the Constitutional Convention for it is proper that our Constitution should continue to evolve through mechanisms such as this.

This brings me to the last of ideals we have sought to put into practice in the last six years - the ideal of an Australia which has the foresight to conserve its heritage and to hand on what is of value to future generations. Our record in conserving Australia's magnificent natural heritage takes second place to no Australian Government, Federal or State at any time. Fraser Island, Kakadu National Park, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, Anti-Whaling legislation and many other initiatives all stand as symbols of a practical ideal realised and we remain committed to that objective.

But there is more to our historic heritage than our natural environment, or historic artifacts and buildings. Our most valuable inheritance from the past, and the most valuable bequest we can make to the future is the heritage of humane values and ideals. Those values are our real treasure.

We who practise our politics in the Liberal tradition believe that it is Liberalism whose ideals and understandings can best realise those values. We must never lose sight of these ideals, and in pursuing them we have a duty to be responsive to changing circumstances and seize the opportunities to create a more secure and prosperous society.

As Young Liberals, you have an active and important role to play in the process of policy formation in our Party and a vital role in carrying the Liberal message to the whole community. I am confident that the enthusiasm and dedication of Tasmania's Young Liberals over the last twenty-five years will continue to serve the Liberal Party and the ideals of Liberalism in the interests of all Tasmanians and all Australians.

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