



14

**PRIME MINISTER**

FOR MEDIA

SUNDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER 1982

ST BASIL'S DINNER, SYDNEY

It really is a very real honour for Tamie and myself to have been asked to share with you this 25th anniversary of St Basil's Homes for the aged. Those who conceived of the idea and through the years who have worked for the homes made an enormous contribution to the elderly and the frail aged within the Greek community of Australia and to Australia itself. I know there has been government assistance from time to time from the State and from the Commonwealth, but what is really important is the sense of community and the individuals who are prepared to get out and to make this kind of contribution possible. It would be a very sad day if we ever came to the circumstance where people said that governments had to do it all, whether it is a state government, a local government or a Commonwealth Government. One of the great things about the Greek community in Australia and one of the great things about Australia as a whole is the way in which people move out to improve their own communities and make a better place than would otherwise be.

This provides the kind of care and concern that can never really come from governments no matter how much those governments might care and might be concerned because a government necessarily has to work through a significant army of public servants and departments and it cannot have the intimate knowledge of the immediate needs of individuals, of families or of elderly people as other people in that community can have. So governments I suppose from their size are necessarily to an extent remote when people from within their own community take charge of these affairs and do it well, then that is something of very real value indeed. I would like to thank and congratulate who have done so much over 25 years in working for St Basil's Homes. They have made the later years of many people much happier than it might otherwise have been.

There are hundreds of thousands of Australians of Greek origin and Greek extraction committed to this country. The overwhelming preponderance of those who were born in Greece have become Australian citizens in its fullest sense and you have all provided enormous energy, skill, initiative and enterprise for the role that has been played in Australia, helping us to build a much better and more vigorous nation than this might otherwise have been. There are industries that would have been established that would not have been established were it not for the Greek association with Australia. There has been an enrichment in our

whole society because of the intermingling of Greek and cultures of other lands and of Australia itself. Australians of Greek origin have taken opportunities, they have set an example to many other people and have won respect throughout the whole community. We often talk about a multicultural society and I think that some significant strides have been made in the achievement of that society over the last five to ten years. Some of these things have been mentioned tonight.

There is one aspect of that which may not be adequately understood. One of the reasons for our support, for my support, for Government support for a multicultural society and all of those things which go to make up that society is because we are committed to a fair society. We might not always achieve it in the fullest measure, but we are committed to a society and to Government policies that are fair as between all Australians, no matter where they may come from, no matter what their origins may be.

I think we have achieved a great deal from the years in which I was a very young child before the last World War when this would have been a somewhat narrow, inward looking introspective anglo-saxon community. There would have been people in the 1930s or earlier who said that to be a good Australian, if you did not come from England or Wales, or Scotland or Ireland I suppose, they would say, forget where you came from. We know that that was a narrow view and a false and that old narrow anglo-saxon view of Australia is very much a thing of the past because overwhelmingly Australians recognise that we are strengthened by diversity, we are strengthened by the coming together of people from many, many different countries. We are strengthened enormously by people who have come to this country through the decades from many countries around the world from every continent in the world. We have learnt so much from each others' cultures, we have learnt a greater tolerance and understanding of what we are all about and of the origins of the people who make up Australia.

I can remember the arguments about multicultural television in the early days within the wider community and to some extent within my own Party. What was all this for people were saying. It was going to be a divisive thing. Why do you want to introduce it into Australia. The people that took that view did not understand any part of what a multicultural Australia was all about because multicultural television was never meant to provide services one hour for Greeks, another hour for Italians and another hour for people from some other country and whatever. It was meant to provide programs which would help to unify Australia because all Australians would want to watch the programs because they were intrinsically good programs and by so watching them, all Australians would understand something more of the origins, of the background of the history in culture of all the people that go to make up this nation. Multicultural television was never divisive in its inspiration. It was unifying, strengthening, leading to a greater understanding amongst all Australians of other Australians.

I have got to say many of those early critics of multicultural television have come to understand now having seen the programs and watched its development, have come to understand that the original concept was a good one and should have been supported as it is now supported and of course we know that the programs are going to be extended to a significant number of other centres and cities around Australia over the next three years.

We began several years ago a review of the post-arrival service for migrants and this is something which in retrospect should have been done about 1955 or 1960 or 1965 at the very latest. It was not done. It was begun about 1976 and led to the Galbally Report. It led to the total acceptance of the original recommendations of that Report and as suggested in the original Report, that led to a review of the programs and of virtually total acceptance of the review only a few weeks ago. This has led of course to many things, many new and I think far-sighted programs which are designed to assist people who first come to this country. The pity of it is that we did not have the wisdom to do it so much earlier. The point now is that it has been done. This must make the early arrival in Australia of people a good deal easier than it would otherwise be. It does more than that. It does not just try and provide the services and the circumstance to make it easier for somebody from another land and who may not speak English too well in the initial stages, to understand what Australia is all about, what services are available, what opportunities there are to be seized. The programs are also designed to encourage the survival and the passing on of the language, the culture the history and traditions of your community, the Greek community as part of Australia and of all the other communities that make up this country.

What we need to understand, and I think overwhelmingly Australians are coming to understand, is that Greek history, your origins are just as much part of Australia as a Scots history, or English history or Welsh history or Irish history, I suppose the countries from which most original settlers came and that it is important for these things to be cherished and passed on from one generation to another. That can lead to things that might be small in themselves, but can be significant in terms of the expression and the understanding that they seek to unfold and the support for community schools which will teach the language and the history of peoples in a way which Australian Government schools or private schools might not otherwise do is one of the attempts and efforts of government to make the passing on of cultures and of languages and of history easier than it might otherwise have been.

Now there is a very widespread commitment to multiculturalism right throughout Australia. I believe it is much better understood than it has ever been. I also believe that we lead the world in what we have done over the last ten years in these areas.

I would like to turn if I could to one or two things that are obviously important to all of us because for those who want to look after their own families, who want decent jobs for their children, who want to build up their standard of living, a strong economy, a strong Australia is obviously very important. I think we all know that we live in a world where there are some difficulties. We know there are problems in Europe, in the United States, in North America, that the price Australia gets for export commodities are a good deal less than they were two or three years ago. Most of us understand that the depths of the world recession in spite of the problems we may have, has effected Australia much less than it has effected most other countries. I believe, with the energy, with the capacities to work of most Australians, that we won't experience problems anything like as great as many of the countries of Europe where unemployment levels for example might be 10, 12 or in Britain 14%. Here it is too high. It is something like half that; but the fact that it is something like half that says something I believe about the kinds of policies Australia has pursued as opposed to the kinds of policies that some other countries have pursued.

We still have recognised the world recession has effected families it has effected businesses and in our last Budget we tried to do some things that would help. There are many changes in the social security area that Fred Chaney looks after and changes that were designed to assist aged people in the community. The is going to be a much greater rate of building of homes for the aged and the frail aged over the next year or two. I don't know how many of you have applications for the faster rate of spending, but I understand that Senator Chaney is making the decisions fairly shortly, but there will be a greater rate of building and that is one kind of response.

There have been some changes in other social security arrangements, again designed to assist individuals or families that might be in greatest difficulty. Family allowances have been increased very significantly. People trying to pay off their own homes are being assisted by a housing rebate because we know interest rates are far, far higher than anyone wants. As a farmer I know very much how interest rates effect people and small businesses and individuals with their homes and all the rest. Here we have been very much effected by what has happened overseas.

The moves over the last week or two in which interest rates have started to come down, are indeed encouraging and give us some reason to hope that that move will be reinforced. I think it is worth noting that it was sometimes said that the Budget was not going to help in that area, well I believe it has helped because it is not only as a result of overseas changes, but also as a result of our Budget that interest rates have started to move down. I am not going to make predictions, because I made predictions once before and it took me about three years after that to try and persuade people that the prediction had in fact been all right, but that circumstances had changed and I am not going to give Lionel Bowen the opportunity to make that kind of argument against me again. I think we must all hope that rates will start to move down in a way which does effect families beneficially.

Also if this last Budget which we introduced can be remembered for anything, I hope it can be remembered as one which encourages the situation in which it makes it easier for Australians to work together and help by working together to overcome whatever problems that we might have. Let me explain that by one example. If you had a family on a single income of say \$300 a week, a wife and two dependent children paying off a housing loan of about \$25,000 which by some of today's standards would be a relatively modest loan then that particular family would be \$18 a week better off as a result of the Budget. Now if that person had to be as much better off by getting the money from an employer on which tax would have to be paid, you would have to get about an extra \$25 or \$30 a week and in some circumstances that could be enough to make it very difficult indeed for the employer and very difficult for him to continue to sell whatever his product was. Therefore, those changes I believe make it reasonable to argue for restraint in things such as wages and reasonable to say that by so doing that family living standards are not going to fall because of other countervailing measures in the Budget.

I think this is an example of the way in which governments can try and create the situation in which different sections, different groups within the Australian community can recognise that there are problems and if we are all prepared to make some kind of contribution to the overcoming of those problems, then it will happen so much more easily, so much quickly than would otherwise be the case.

There have been some difficult arguments in the last few weeks and very briefly I would like to try and explain the Government's point of view. I said that much of our attitude towards multiculturalism and many of the policies that we have introduced have been introduced because we believe in a fair society and because we believe that governments must govern for all Australians no matter where they are, where they have come from or what they are doing, equally and reasonably. This is one of the things that we have had very much in mind over a somewhat contentious and difficult tax legislation which some of you might have heard of over the last three weeks, because a horrible word retrospectivity has come into the argument. I don't think anyone likes retrospective legislation, but I would like to say very briefly what we are in fact doing with legislation that John Howard introduced last Thursday night.

That legislation is only seeking to collect from a certain very narrow group within the Australian community, tax that should have been paid, but was not paid because of a device that was patently wrong and always was wrong and that at some point always had to involve in relation to some of the people that participated in it, an illegality. It involved a device in which there was significant income in the course of a year in relation say to a company and no tax whatever was paid in relation to that income.

It would be wonderful if all of us having our individual income could think up some legal and proper way in which we did not have to pay any tax, but if the whole community did that we would know quite well that the community just would not work. The schools, the multicultural programs, the whole fabric of government and society would fall apart. There is no reason in my view why people with access to sophisticated legal and accountancy advice should evade their obligations to the wider Australian community. The kind of device that we have been talking about was in fact outlawed in 1980, but there was a very large amount of tax that should have been paid and was not.

The legislation that John Howard is introducing is not criminal legislation as somebody said why did it have to be. It is not, it is tax legislation and it is designed to collect the tax from those who benefited from the particular device known as the bottom of the harbour scheme. It became known as a bottom of the harbour scheme because the company was sold, people converted the income into a capital gain and ultimately the papers got dropped in the harbour - I don't know whether it was Sydney harbour or the port of Melbourne, one or the other or it might even have been Fremantle Harbour in Perth. That is what happened. Without going into the intricacy of it, it is the only device which this legislation is related to. We have had to balance our dislike of any kind of retrospective legislation against our concept and our idea of fairness for all Australians.

We have quite plainly as a Government given greater weight to the concept, to the idea of fairness in this particular instance, because if there are people who are not paying taxes and who ought to be, then other people have to pay higher taxes and that is not fair and it is not reasonable.

Other people say that this has never happened at all, I could but I won't point to learned opinions in the United Kingdom going back to 1941 or '42 or '43 in which the Lord Chancellor, in our terms, our Chief Justice has confirmed retrospective legislation in Britain for very much the same reason as we have introduced it in Australia. So it is not a novel step within English speaking societies. It was done there because some people were acting very unfairly in relation to the rest of the British community. There is an interesting phrase because one of those giving the judgement said that from the nature of the contest, that is people not wanting to pay tax and people having to collect tax when those who are trying to do much not to pay tax go too far, they should understand the rigour of the contest and know the consequences. We believe that some people in Australia, and it is a very few, went too far and they ought to understand the rigour of the context and there is the question of fairness to all Australians. That I believe is perhaps the most important principle of all by which governments must judge their own decisions.

It is a while ago, but not very long ago, since President visited Australia and I was honoured to be his host while he was here. I was not able to be in Sydney while he was in Sydney, but in

Canberra and in Melbourne. One of the most exciting things I think I ever was part of was the occasion in which there were 60,000 Australians, I would believe overwhelmingly of Greek origin around the War Memorial in Melbourne on an occasion to welcome and to honour President Karamanlis. It was a great and exciting occasion. I think it did much for the relationship between Greece and Australia and between our two peoples. I am very glad indeed that the President's visit is going to be honoured for all time by the Australian-Greek Presidential Awards which over the last two or three days those who have won the awards for the first time are first being announced that will be taken up early in the new year.

We have in the past had Churchhill Fellowships, Queen Elizabeth II Trust Fellowships and the Menzies Trust. The Australian-Greek Presidential Awards in honour of President Karamanlis' visit to Australia is the first time in the history of Australia that such awards have been offered I believe to honour one of Australia's great ethnic communities and to do so in a permanent way because down through the years, each year young Australians I suppose mostly of Greek origin, but not necessarily of Greek origin, will be chosen to study in Greece to learn more of a very important part of the history and culture and experience of a people who have done so much to help build up this Australia which we all love. Some awards have been announced in Melbourne, others are to be announced tomorrow morning in this city. I am very glad indeed that these awards have been established because they will be a perpetual reminder of the living vitality of the relationship between Greece and Australia and to the contribution that Australians of Greek origin have made to building this nation.

Australia is not made up of governments of any kind. Australia is made up of people and the nature of this country the kind of society it is, is dependent upon the actions of something a little more than 15 million Australians in every day as they go about their lives. You are leaders of your community. You come mostly from Sydney but not entirely from Sydney from other places as well as we have been told, but all of you in this room have contributed enormously not only to the Greek community in Australia, but you have contributed enormously to building the kind of Australia that we all want to see for the future and I want to thank you all for that.