



EMBARCO: 5.00PM

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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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ELECTORATE TALK

I have explained over the last week why the election is important and why it is being held at this time. In the last day or two we will have all read reports in the paper that the Labor Party would fight this election on a program of reconciliation. There are one or two questions I would like to ask about that. If the Labor Party wants reconciliation, why is the Labor Party itself so divisive, why does it threaten the consensus we have had for a long while on defence and education and above all, on the wage pause?

The Federal Government successfully negotiated the wage pause with all State Governments, Liberal, Labor and National Party. It is rare for such a consensus to be reached. But the pause has not only been supported by every Government, it is respected and supported by the majority of Australians. Everyone knows that the \$300 million the Commonwealth alone will save in wages will provide jobs and the pause will help to make our industries competitive and profitable.

A week or so ago even Mr Hayden recognised economic reality and gave grudging support to the pause. Then the unions, or possibly Mr Hawke, cracked the whip and Mr Hayden returned to full opposition to the wage pause. By opposing the pause the Federal Labor Party and the trade unions - the two cannot be separated - are the odd ones out. Federal Labor voted against it in Parliament in both Houses and since then Labor's Deputy Leader has incited people to take industrial action against the pause. When asked whether Labor would support industrial action, the Deputy Leader said on 27 January "yes, you have got to do that".

Mr Hawke's statement last Friday that the wage pause would continue until a national economic summit is called, is meaningless. The pause would only continue for a week or so, because the summit would be his first act.

It would seem clear from everything Labor has said that it in fact supports the 8% claim by the oil workers. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition made that clear when he said the unions were entitled to take industrial action, yet the key people in the dispute - the electricians on strike - are earning up to \$30,000 a year. If these demands were met it would start a new major wage round, undermining the whole basis of the wage pause.

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Now, in these circumstances the Federal Labor Party cannot turn around and say everyone else is being confrontationist and it is the only Party capable of reconciliation, because the reverse is the truth. It is the Federal Labor Party which is confronting all eight Governments. It is the Federal Labor Party which is being destructive. It is the Federal Labor Party which is breaking the unity, the consensus of Australia.

The ANZUS Treaty has been regarded as an integral part of Australia's defence for decades and it has been supported by all major parties. But the Victorian Government has made it perfectly plain it does not welcome visits to Victorian ports by American nuclear ships. As I have often explained, that means keeping all American ships out of Victorian ports because by saying whether their ships are nuclear armed or not, the United States would be giving vital defence secrets to the Soviet Union and they obviously cannot do that. The Victorian Government's attitude has been reinforced by the Deputy Leader of the Federal Opposition who has said that "we cannot allow Australia's defence forces to become inter-linked with those of the United States".

The Commonwealth Government had to press the Victorian Government very firmly and insist that the visits would continue to take place, but the Federal Labor made no effort to stop the Victorian Government and if Labor took that view in Government it would make it impossible for the Americans to fulfill their obligations under ANZUS. The American alliance is a long-standing policy which is acceptable to nearly all Australians. Why then does Labor challenge some essential elements of it? What sort of ally are we if we say to the United States, we want your help but your ships cannot visit our ports?

If Labor believes in reconciliation, why does it threaten to take away the inalienable right of every child to some Government support for his or her education, a right that had come to be accepted by all political parties? Labor is thus creating insecurity and uncertainty and is denying a choice in education to thousands of families who are not as well-off as some others.

These are three issues on which the Labor Party is seeking to breach what, without them, would be a full national consensus. One of the reasons why the Labor Party is divisive is that they are a party of factions, and one of the strongest of those factions is the Socialist Left, totally opposed to almost everything that Australia stands for. If the Labor Party wants reconciliation, why do they have in the platform a commitment to turning Australia into a republic? Why do they want to tear up our flag and get a new one? That is a further commitment in their platform. Why do they raise these issues if they want reconciliation? I don't suppose they will want to talk about them during this campaign, but as platform items, all Labor members of the Labor Party would be committed to put them into effect.

Against the background of their recent actions and committed policies, their slogan about bringing Australia together is total humbug. Labor's internal divisions make it very difficult for them to reach decisions on policies. For example, they oppose the wage pause even though they have absolutely no economic policy of their own. I asked a large number of people last week if they could name one single policy of the Labor Party which is relevant to the current economic circumstances of Australia. One or two said "oh, they would call a conference", but a conference isn't a policy. We consult with people all the time, the unions, management, the State Governments. It is a continuing process, but it is not a policy.

The fact that nobody could think of a single Labor policy which is relevant to the Australian economy in 1983, and that Labor offers no more than a threat to the national consensus says something very fundamental about this Labor Party. It shows that not only is the Labor Party thoroughly divided, divisive and confrontationist in its approach, but also that a Labor Government would lead to enormous insecurity for Australian families.

If anybody wanted to risk the future and elect a Labor Government, it would be the greatest gamble in the history of their own lives.

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