



PRIME MINISTER

E. & O.E. - PROOF ONLY

TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH AT OPENING OF HUGHES CAMPAIGN, UNITED SERVICES CLUB, SUTHERLAND - 27 JANUARY 1984

... Les has made his decision. We are obviously going to have the services in Canberra of an extremely talented young man in the person of Bob Tickner. I look forward to welcoming him into the ranks of the party in Canberra and I know that he will make a constructive and telling contribution to the affairs of the party and to the affairs of government.

Now, if I could I would like to pick up the approach that has been adopted by Neville Wran in opening this campaign because it is necessary if we are going to understand where Australia is today - the threshold of 1984 - to remember just what this country was like 12 months ago.

I don't want to spend any time in going into those details because despite whatever attempts we may make to push the matter out of our mind they are etched too deeply in the consciousness of Australians, easily to be forgotten.

Rather I want to remind you of the promise that I made on behalf of the Australian Labor Party, being elected as leader there in February and being catapulted into that early campaign that was thrust upon us by a desperate Prime Minister.

I perceive that underlying every other problem in this country was the fact that we had had seven desperate years of division under a Prime Minister who proceeded (inaudible) role of government to set Australian against Australian. There had never, in our relatively short history as one nation, and it is, as you know, coincidental with the century - never before in its history had there been a time of such divisiveness and we were tearing ourselves apart under the impetus of that approach from Canberra.

So, I promised you, you will recall, that a major task of my Government would be on its election to undertake the process of national reconciliation because it seemed to me then as it still seems to me, whatever grand policies we may have - and we must have them - and programs - and we must have them - that until you get a sense of community of purpose, all else substantially will be in vain and so I promised you that we would undertake the task of national reconciliation as the basis for recovery and reconstruction.

It is less than 12 months since you gave us that mandate on 5 March 1983, but I believe I am able to come to the people of Hughes and report that we have significantly achieved that task of reconciliation.

I said that within one month of coming to office we would call a national economic summit conference. We were commissioned in office on 11 March and on 11 April in the house of the people - in the House of Representatives - we called that historic conference where the representatives of business, large and of small business, the trade union movement, the great State Governments, the local governments, community organisations, they gathered there historically in the house of the people and in a sense that was a beginning, if you like, of formalising of a pact between the people of Australia and their representatives - a commitment that as far as it was conceivable within the democratic processes where we do have differences - as far as it was possible and consistent with the pursuit of principle, both people and their representatives would commit themselves to trying to work together for the benefit of Australia and they went away from that inspired not simply by the conference but with a view, I believe a determination to make the principles of the Summit conference work. We, on our part as government, said that we would move from the Summit to legislation to establish an Economic Planning Advisory Council where the sort of representation that had been there in large numbers at the Summit, would be reflected on a statutory basis in the Economic Planning Advisory Council.

And we have received the support in that process from business and the farmers, the trade unions, welfare organisations and that Economic Planning Advisory Council is something to which the Government attaches very significant importance. It meets in the Cabinet room under my chairmanship and senior ministers present.

I want you to understand what that reflects because it is a fundamental change in the approach to government and by government in the history of this country, because we make available to your representatives, whether they are the representatives of you as Australian citizens, as workers, as businessmen large or small or in the community sphere, or, as I will be saying tonight in Corangamite, the rural community - your representatives are there and we make available to them the information that we have as government and reciprocally those representatives of great organisations of Australia come to us and give us the benefit of their thinking, of their experience, so that now in a very real sense I believe we have translated the concept of Lincoln with government of the people by the people for the people into a reality because we don't say, as the elected people there in Canberra that we have all wisdom. We certainly believe that we have ... experience. We believe that we have appropriate policies and programs, but there is no monopoly of wisdom as far as we're concerned. We really want to tap the resources of the Australian people and that is what we are about and that is how we have undertaken the process of national reconciliation.

We started at the Summit, transferred it to the Economic Planning Advisory Council. And all of my Ministers - all of them - know that what we want and what is their desire is that in the discharge of their important portfolios they reflect in their microcosms, if you like, of government, the same concepts as are involved in the Economic Planning Advisory Council.

In other words they are consistently consulting with the organisations which are relevant to the discharge of their portfolio and that is how you make good government and that is how you get a cohesive and effective community - not to impose decisions but to try and share information and reciprocally get information back as experienced from the community and that has been the basis of this government. And that is why we are now, in less than 12 months, able to point to the result in those secondary processes of recovery and reconstruction.

I want to remind you, without exhausting you with a whole range of statistics, but I go to some of the important areas reflecting that success in government. Now, of course, the most important area is employment. I remind you of the promise I made on behalf of our party in the February/March by-election. The promise was in three parts.

I said we would halt the explosion of unemployment. I said we would start to create jobs. Thirdly, I said that in a period of three years we would create half a million new jobs in this country.

Now, they were deliberate statements of intent and I am able to say now, in less than 12 months, that we have achieved what we said we would do.

Let me be specific.

You know that the rate of unemployment is coming down. We not only have stopped the exploding upward rate of unemployment, we've brought it down and we will continue to do that.

Secondly, we already have created a significant number of new jobs. In the Budget, being cautious in our approach, we expected that in financial 83/84 we may create 90,000 new jobs - that is between 1 July 1983 and 30 June 1984 - 90,000. Already we have created over 130,000 in that financial period and indeed, in the period since we've been in office until the present time, 158,000 new jobs. So that you can see that in that three year period where we promised half a million new jobs we are already right on target.

So, in that area of basic importance to the Australian people, we've altered that disaster that characterised particularly the last 2-3 years of conservative rule. Now, we don't say that with any sense of complacency because it is going to be difficult to get back towards those experiences of full employment that characterised the post-war generation, but we, in less than a year, have demonstrated our commitment to do

things to reverse the trend and what we are calling on is the community as a whole to understand that this problem of unemployment is a community problem, not just one for governments. We have demonstrated our commitment, we have given evidence of our capacity. We call upon the rest of the community now to join with us so that we can progressively remove this blight of unemployment and the frustration of the hopes and aspirations of the young, from this community.

So that's employment and unemployment.

We also said that we would adopt policies which would address themselves to the great problems of inflation and interest rates. We have succeeded.

You know in respect of interest rates from your own daily experience that we have significantly reduced interest rates and that is not accident. It has followed from the responsible and carefully thought through economic strategies which were involved in the May Statement of last year and in the Budget process. And in the result business, home buyers, large business and small business, all people dependent upon the use of money in this community, know that there have been significant reductions in interest rates. It has for home purchasers released their capacity to satisfy their aspirations and to meet their needs in other ways.

Inflation - we said we would bring that down and we are significantly doing so. The figures that came out just Wednesday show a continuation of that downward trend, it's now down to 8.6% and I promise you that in the year 1984 inflation will come down significantly more so in those areas of employment, interest rates and inflation, we have delivered what we promised.

We recognise that one of the great tragedies that characterise the mismanagement of the Australian economy is the way in which the housing industry has been run down to a point where there was a significant under-utilisation of capacity. That is an economic and a social disaster and we immediately took deliberate steps in both the public and the private housing sector to turn that around.

In the public housing sector we gave the largest increase in funds for public housing that has ever occurred, increased the funds from 363 million up to 500 million - an increase of 50%.

In the private sector we introduced a scheme which has come to be recognised by all sectors of the industry as the most effective scheme in the history of this country - the first home owners scheme which had the two benefits - firstly of being directed towards those on higher income most in need of assistance and secondly being a scheme which is directed towards the building of new housing rather than financing the transfer of existing housing stock between the upper income sections of the Australian industry.

And in the event the housing and construction industry is now moving to a point where it is operating very close to the limit of its capacity and we will achieve the objectives that we expressed in the Budget of having housing running at an annual rate of at least 135,000 units which is right up there to the top of its capacity.

So, in all these things we have acted in ways which were calculated on the basis of cooperation and consensus to turn this economy round and in aggregate terms the figures are there - the year before we came in - leaving farm products aside because some suggestions to the contrary we do not claim credit for the breaking of the drought. Putting farm products aside, just looking at non-farm products, in the year 82/83 there was a 1% decline in gross domestic product, including farm product - in this year the growth 83/84, the growth will be 6% - so we've had that turn-around from -1% up to 6% and that, if you like in aggregate terms, reflects the success of the policies of this Government.

In conclusion I want to say that when you examine the operations of democracy, it is not sufficient just to talk about what a government does. You have to look at an Opposition because an Opposition is part of the function of the democracy. Unfortunately you haven't got much to look at in this country, so it won't take me long to talk about it.

But as has been said, led by Mr. Peacock on the one hand and Mr. Sinclair on the other. I don't want to talk too much about them in personal terms. I believe that some of my colleagues will not be capable of being restrained in talking about Mr. Sinclair when the Parliament resumes. We are told that he is waiting for Parliament to resume because he can't reply to what was in the Cross Report until Parliament resumes. I don't quite understand why that is so. There is no muzzle across his mouth. People ought to be able to talk before Parliament resumes. Is it because he feels that he may say something in the Parliament that he is not game to say outside. Nevertheless there will be a full opportunity, I can assure Mr. Sinclair and the Opposition, to have a full analysis of the contents of the Cross Report, the most damning indictment of any politician in the history of this country.

But more importantly than those problems of leadership of the Opposition, I would remind you of how they have, in fact, behaved during this year of our Government, because you will recall that when we went to the people in February/March, we said to them that we believed that one of the great stings of the previous government had been that they had been so distinctive and discriminating in their approach to the application of the laws to the people of this country in terms of the responsibility to pay tax. There had been a vast tax evasion and avoidance industry grown up under seven years of conservative government. We said that we could not perceive the beginnings of justice in a situation where ordinary Australians - workers and small businessmen - had no alternatives.

They met their obligations under the law automatically and we saw no justice in the situation where hundreds of millions - indeed over the years billions of dollars had been avoided by a relatively small section of the Australian community. So, we said that we would take action in the Parliament to ensure that as far as it was within our power, the law would operate in a way that everyone met their commitment.

Now, we passed the law, passed the legislation, passed the bill in the House of Representatives, but in our bicameral system it doesn't become law until it is passed by the Senate. Unfortunately, the will of the people of 5 March election was not reflected in Labor having control of the Senate. So that legislation which has been up there three times to ensure that everyone meets the law in regard to the payment of tax, has on three occasions been rejected by this unholy alliance - the Liberal Party, the National Party, some of the Democrats, and Senator Harradine. Now, that has meant very simply that our capacity as a Government to deliver to you the promise that you would all be equal before the law has been frustrated and it means that there continues to be an additional obligation upon ordinary taxpayers to meet more of the tax bill because a wealthy few - and when I say wealthy I'm not talking about all wealthy people - it's a minority, but significant - have avoided their obligations and it means that ordinary people have to pay more. Now, we are still committed to the position that we will pursue the commitment that we made last February and March. I give notice that there will be a further opportunity to this Opposition in this year to make it clear to the Australian people whether that is what they want to continue to do - to directly impose a greater tax burden upon the ordinary people of this country.

I am committed, my Government is committed, as we go to the next Budget to try and reduce the deficit and to bring in tax reduction. You would notice that the extent to which we will be able to do that will depend upon the readiness of the Opposition in the Senate to match the clearly expressed will of the Australian people and so, my friends, you here at the electorate of Hughes, have the opportunity on 18 February to ... and to renew the mandate that was so effectively carried out over so many years by Les Johnson, renew that mandate on 18 February through Bob Tickner, who will bring, as I say, great capacity and talent to the Parliament.

I thank you for the support that you've given us over the years. I ask you to renew that on 18 February and we will continue to give you the service - the Government - of the sort that we've given in the first 12 months. We believe it has been successful. We believe it is the sort of Government that will guarantee the future of this great country of ours.

Thank you very much.