

EMBARGOED AGAINST
DELIVERY



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER - NATIONAL PRESS CLUB - 29 NOVEMBER 1984

As this campaign draws to its close, the central issues for the judgment of the Australian people on Saturday remain as they were at the beginning - whether we are, as a nation under Labor, to consolidate and build upon the great gains of 1983 and 1984, to sustain in the years ahead strong economic growth without inflation, and on these firm foundations to build a fairer, more equitable society in a nation able to use its new self-respect and standing in our region and the world to add a persuasive, persistent and consistent voice to the cause of peace and disarmament.

Or, by contrast, to accept the alternative offered - a return to the policies of the past and all that they produced - renewed and mounting unemployment, renewed and mounting inflation, renewed and mounting industrial disputation, confrontation and division.

It may have been your expectation - held perhaps with some trepidation on the part of those of you who have followed the long campaign trail - that I would use this last major forum of the campaign to recapitulate it all again.

But I am sure you now know - and the people of Australia now know, the basic arguments and issues - our record and achievements and program, and that you and they know, all too well, the record of our opponents and the consequences of their proposals.

But rather today, beyond bringing together the major threads and thrusts of our policies and commitments, I want, through you to the people of Australia, to place our program for the next three years firmly in the context of our longer vision for the future of our country - a clear, clear-eyed and above all, clear-headed vision, which recognises, rationally and objectively, the challenges, the problems, the difficulties as well as the great opportunities which we all face together in this decade and beyond.

It is a vision for a nation growing stronger year by year, by the wise and full use of its rich human and material resources, as a partner in the world's most dynamic economic region; for a nation becoming year by year more equitable and more fair, in which true equality of opportunity for all is no mere slogan but a living reality; and for a nation

constructively, persistently, unremittingly contributing to the supreme objective of a world and a region at peace, free from the threat of nuclear holocaust.

Let me at once go to the three essential elements of our program to give flesh and substance to these goals - economic, social, and international.

First, the economic foundations.

Sustained growth without inflation is the very basis and condition for achieving the legitimate aspirations the Australian people have for themselves and their families - for improved living standards, for secure employment, for decent housing and for greater security and greater dignity, in retirement and sickness or incapacity for whatever reason; and to enable us, as a nation, to improve the lot of those who depend upon social security payments for their entitlement to share in the prosperity of their country.

We have been described as the lucky country.

Perhaps, in the past, we accepted that description too easily. And perhaps, in the past, we allowed ourselves to ignore the fact that the original author of the phrase intended, not mere self-congratulation but a warning.

For too long - we tended to assume that with our abundance of resources, growth would come naturally, without real effort, and that the world would readily buy our surplus production.

And the result was that, in the halcyon days, opportunities were squandered to place our growth and the maintenance of our standards on an even firmer footing.

Now, that growth has once again been achieved - and this time by the efforts, restraint and responsibility of the whole community - we must ensure we do not make that mistake again.

Above all, we cannot and must not allow our efforts and energies to be dissipated in needless conflict and contrived confrontation of the kind that occurred in the years before March 1983.

To maintain high levels of growth over a long period without fuelling inflation requires the right mix of fiscal and monetary policies, and, as this Government has alone been able to do, the establishment of an incomes policy through the Accord, and wide-ranging consultative procedures for the economy as a whole and for its component sectors.

I believe that on the basis of the approach and the

undertakings given at the last election, we have been able to move together with extraordinary success in establishing that vital co-operation and in establishing the essential policy framework.

This campaign has enabled us to take a major - and I believe in the history of Australian elections, an unprecedented step - towards giving Australia an even stronger economic policy framework to ensure strong, sustained and enduring non-inflationary growth in the years ahead.

And I repeat the commitment I have made on behalf of the Labor Government of Australia:

In our next three year term of Government -

- . the overall level of taxation will not increase as a proportion of gross domestic product;
- . the deficit will not increase as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product;
- . Government spending increases will be restrained below the rate of economic growth.

And when I say that no previous Prime Minister, no previous Australian Government, has given so clear a forward commitment, it is because no previous Government has been able to establish the conditions which make such a commitment achievable.

Now I have necessarily couched the three elements of that commitment in the language of the economist.

But let me put it directly in terms of relevance to ordinary Australian families and citizens - it means your tax burden will be reduced in an economic environment of growth, with low inflation and reduced pressure on interest rates.

It is a commitment based on a recognition of the fact that in our mixed economy three out of every four jobs is provided by the private sector. A healthy, growing Australian economy requires a healthy, growing private sector. The demands of Government upon the income of citizens and business should not inhibit initiative or investment directly or through excessive expenditures produce the same result indirectly by imposing upward pressures on interest rates in the capital market. This can and will be achieved. Our record shows that we can. And the Australian and international business and financial community has, by word and action, expressed its confidence that we will.

The structure of Australian industry is constantly changing.

In the past that change has occurred haphazardly, often destructively for both those who employ and those who are employed, and all too often without any real concern for the economic and social implications for the community.

We are therefore committed to encouraging, with the co-operation of business, trade unions and relevant levels of Government, the orderly restructuring of Australian industry. We want to see an industrial structure which is competitive, export-oriented and capable of providing increased, secure and satisfying employment. We have demonstrated that this can be done in the steel industry which was facing extinction when we came to office. And we have shown it can be done in the motor vehicle industry.

On the part of Government, the pursuit of effective industry restructuring requires a co-ordination of relevant policy areas - industry and commerce, trade, science and technology, education, employment and industrial relations, defence support. We have already brought these portfolio areas together at the Cabinet committee level under the chairmanship of Senator Button. In our next term this co-ordination will be made even more effective at the Ministerial and official level.

Education and training is so important in this matter that I should say something more about it.

We have strengthened and given certainty of funding to both the public and the private sector at the primary and secondary level, and have provided the first real increases in funding at the tertiary level for several years.

But we must not, as a nation, delude ourselves that increased funding alone meets the requirements of the future.

We must be concerned with the quality of our education system to ensure that our young people are equipped as well as possible to work and live in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world. Our Government has commissioned Professor Karmel to report to us on what is required to achieve this outcome in the primary and secondary levels and Mr Hudson, the Chairman of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, in the tertiary area. We will act promptly upon their reports.

Our concern as a nation for our young people must go beyond substantially improving the formal education system.

Over the years the whole range of employment, training and retraining programs has evolved in a totally ad hoc, unco-ordinated and often irrelevant fashion.

We will soon receive the report of Mr Peter Kirby on this critically important subject and, on the basis of that report, will move to create a coherent, integrated set of programs that will match the aspirations and training of our youth to the new and changing requirements of industry.

And in this area we should all note with satisfaction that more of our young people are staying at school longer. Education retention rates have been abysmally low by international standards. But from thirty-six per cent in 1982 they have jumped to forty per cent in 1983, the highest for a decade and will be higher again in 1984, as a result of our policies. We will continue the Participation and Equity Program, and other important initiatives, to bring Australia up to levels which we need, and can achieve. We cannot afford to be a second or third rate nation in the training of the talents of our youth - and under a Labor Government, we will not be.

I have referred to our place in the world's most dynamic region. If we are to maximise our own economic growth we must increasingly, as I have often put it, mesh our economy into the rapidly expanding economies of North-east, South-east Asia and the Pacific. Our policies will continue increasingly to be directed towards ensuring that we contribute to and benefit from the growth of these countries, not only in agricultural and mineral products but through a range of processed and manufactured goods and services, applying the best technology available.

One of the most important single developments in the world today is the economic revolution in China. The productive energies of almost a quarter of the world's population are being released by that revolution which is opening up China more and more to the Western world - and as a result of our endeavours, not those of the Government alone, but of the business community as well, no country in the Western world is better regarded or better placed to be involved, to our mutual benefit, with China than Australia. We will continue to strengthen this significant relationship.

And in the broader area of international trade, we will continue our careful work in the international forums to encourage the resumption of multilateral trade negotiations and to defend Australia's interests against unfair and often subsidised competition in world markets.

And that is an effort we will continue not only in defence of Australia's interests but to avoid the great damage, if not disaster that could be done to international trade if there were to be increasing resort to these practices.

I now come to the second element - our social program.

And let me say that for this Labor Government and for this Labor Prime Minister, our social goals are in no way, a secondary priority; they are a fundamental priority - the very heart of what Labor is about.

But our goals cannot be achieved, either in the short or long-term, without sustained, non-inflationary growth.

But let me say : a society which dedicated itself, narrowly and exclusively, to a single goal of economic growth, would sow the seed of its ultimate disintegration.

True, growth should be pursued for the benefits it produces for the direct participants in the process by which productive growth is achieved.

But equally, as a national goal, it must justify itself, and be inspired by, the recognition that growth is the basis for ensuring that those of our fellow Australians who are not its direct beneficiaries receive from a compassionate society the opportunity to share equitably in the fruits of growth.

Our vision is for an Australia in which this will be assumed as a natural obligation of our society. Our commitment is to that end and our policies will be directed to its achievement.

And it is to this goal that we have applied the benefits of growth already achieved.

While all Australians have benefited from economic recovery, the greatest beneficiaries in relative terms have been the poor and disadvantaged, and low and middle income earners. In framing our last Budget, the Cabinet took the view that the highest priority for new outlays should be accorded to social welfare recipients, which was reflected in the provision of more than \$1 billion additional funding in a full financial year. The tax cuts now being enjoyed by all Australians, are also highly progressive, with low and middle income earners receiving the greatest benefits. As well, of course, the Medicare levy is highly progressive, with the lowest charges for health services being levied on those who have the least capacity to pay.

The Government will also be giving the achievement of twenty-five per cent of male average weekly earnings as the basic pension rate, the highest priority among welfare measures during its second term.

Already we have raised pensions as a percentage of male AWE from 22.9 per cent in December 1982 to 23.8 per cent today.

But I put to you a broader vision. So often society is

called upon to support those who would make no demand upon the community if they had been able fully to develop the talents within them. Our vision is for an Australia within which every person irrespective of sex, race, ethnic origin or income levels of parents, shall have an equality of opportunity to develop to the full their individual talents. Our commitment is to that end, and our policies will be directed to its achievement. And, in this respect, let me say that there is no part of our record to date in which we take greater pride than the many measures we have initiated to remove discrimination against women in Australia.

No Government recognises more deeply than ours that so many women still desire their fulfilment from the role of wife and mother. We respect them and will continue as we have in so many ways to increase the satisfaction of family life.

Equally, no Government has recognised more clearly the obligation to give substance - not just lip-service - to society's claim that there is no discrimination against women who seek their fulfilment outside or in addition to the role in the home. We will continue to do so.

But underlying everything - everything we hope for, everything we are working for - is the third element of our vision for Australia - a world free of the nightmare of nuclear catastrophe.

Long before I became Prime Minister, long before I entered Parliament, at every appropriate international and national forum, and whenever the opportunity arose, I have affirmed and reaffirmed my deepest belief, that all the efforts to create a more prosperous, a freer and a fairer society in our own community and in the world community, all will have been in vain, if we cannot live in a world at peace.

There can be no higher purpose in Government than the pursuit of positively peaceful relations between nations and particularly the elimination of the threat of nuclear devastation and destruction.

No person and no Party is entitled to claim a monopoly of either morality or wisdom in these matters. My Party and my Government make no such claim.

But we do claim credit for the hard, unremitting, purposeful and effective work we have done in bilateral negotiations and all relevant international forums to advance the cause of effective disarmament, the reduction of conventional and nuclear arsenals, the prevention of the spread of nuclear weapons, the achievement of a convention against chemical weapons, the prevention of an extension of the arms race into outer space and the initiative for a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone.

This week, Australia obtained a larger vote than last year for our resolution to establish the processes leading to negotiation of a comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Again we were able, as last year, to persuade the super-powers and the other nuclear weapons states not to oppose this year's stronger resolution.

We are doing this work without dramatics, without grandstanding, without breast-beating - because that, and that alone, is the way anything worthwhile, anything lasting, can be achieved.

This work has been pursued with integrity by my Foreign Minister Bill Hayden, assisted by our Ambassador for

Disarmament and an expanded Arms Control and Disarmament Branch in the Department of Foreign Affairs. We are establishing an independent Peace Research Centre at the Australian National University.

We will not pursue the dangerous futility - and fatuity - of unilateralism. We are an aligned nation and our alliance with the United States is an alliance of peaceful and defensive purpose. Our Government will never initiate offensive action against another country.

And, I repeat, we will continue to pursue the constructive work of the past twenty months in the field of disarmament so that Australia will retain the widespread international respect which was reflected in our recent record vote for membership of the United Nations Security Council.

I know the depth of feeling on this supreme issue of our time - the supreme issue in human history. And everything I have said, everything we have done as a government, everything we are committed to continue to do, proves that my colleagues and I share that feeling completely, unequivocally, profoundly. There is no question about our needing some kind of message from the electorate on this matter, or a reminder about the deep feelings of the people of Australia, particularly our young people. We need no prompting.

We hear the voice of the people - and it is the voice of Labor and of this Labor Government.

And for our part, we will not need to analyse the results next Saturday to learn the will of the Australian people on this matter; or our responsibilities as the Government of Australia - the responsibility and the duty to continue our unremitting efforts in the cause of world peace and nuclear disarmament.

Conclusion

We live in the most dramatically changing and challenging times in recorded history.

The nature of the human condition has been put in a most striking way by the American sociologist, Kenneth Boulding. Speaking for his contemporaries, he said:

"I was born in the middle of human history. The world in which I live is as different from the world in which I was born as that world was from the world of Julius Caesar."

And the challenge to us, in this country and in this age, is to face these times with purpose, with confidence and self-confidence - confidence in ourselves, confidence in each other - that together, we can use our resources - our physical and material and above all, human resources - to build a better, a freer and a fairer Australia, and help build a better, freer, fairer world.

And in putting this fundamental proposition - this simple statement of achievable goals - for ourselves, for our children and our grandchildren - I find a deep continuity in the themes of this election campaign and those of the last campaign - despite the great differences in Australia's situation, now and then, and the great differences in Australia's prospects, now and then.

For the underlying message of that campaign - and the underlying strength of Labor's case in 1983, was hope, confidence and co-operation, in place of despair and in place of the politics of fear and confrontation.

And that remains the alternative in this election; and that contrast has provided the fundamental distinction between our Government and the alternative.

And while in these opening remarks, I have deliberately refrained from canvassing in any detail what the alternative offers, I feel bound to raise one point specifically.

And that is their proposal - I regard it, and I believe the overwhelming majority of people in Australia will regard it, as a threat - to abolish the Arbitration Commission. There could be no clearer evidence that what they offer is a return to the policies which produced the division, disruption and disaster of their last term of office.

And one can only ask: will these people never learn the lessons of history?

Friends,

I firmly believe that no country is better endowed than Australia to meet successfully the great challenges of our time, the great challenges and opportunities of the region and the world.

And we are now splendidly placed to hand over to our children - as we and they approach the 21st century - a nation of strength and growth, of fairness; a nation and a people entitled to look at itself, its achievements and its standing in the world, with pride, dignity and self-respect.

In the body of this speech I have concentrated more on the challenges, the complexities, the problems and the difficulties we all undoubtedly must confront, together, in the years ahead.

But it is precisely because there are challenges, precisely because there are going to be problems and difficulties, that Australia needs a strong, united government with a clear and consistent idea of what lies ahead; and a government with a clear and consistent program to meet those challenges.

And in December 1984, and for the next three years and beyond - the leadership that Australia needs and deserves can only come from an Australian Labor Government.

My colleagues and I have devoted our public lives to equipping ourselves to give that kind of leadership to our great country. We, together with you the people of Australia, have successfully met the immediate challenge of getting our country moving and growing again.

Let us now, in the same spirit - and I believe with the same certainty of success - set out hands to the greater, the more enduring task, of achieving together these great national purposes and goals I have set out today, for our Australia of the future, and our children's future.
