



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

LAUNCH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OF THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT BY GOUGH WHITLAM
AT THE PRESS CLUB CANBERRA
MONDAY 11 NOVEMBER 1985

GOUGH WHITLAM, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, GUESTS,

THIS IS IN EVERY WAY AN HISTORIC DAY AND AN HISTORIC OCCASION. AND IT SAYS A GREAT DEAL, NOT ONLY ABOUT GOUGH WHITLAM THE MAN, BUT ALSO ABOUT OUR PARTY - THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY - WHICH HE LED FOR SO LONG, THAT WE ARE ABLE TO COME TOGETHER ON THIS DAY OF ALL DAYS NOT TO COMMISERATE, BUT TO CELEBRATE.

WE ARE CELEBRATING OF COURSE THE PUBLICATION OF THIS BOOK.

AND BECAUSE OF WHAT THIS BOOK IS - THE RECORD OF THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT OF 1972 - 1975 - WE ARE ALSO CELEBRATING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS IMPORTANT PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA.

MOST OF ALL, WE ARE CELEBRATING GOUGH WHITLAM FORMER LABOR PRIME MINISTER AND A GREAT AUSTRALIAN, WHO LED LABOR TO GOVERNMENT IN 1972 AFTER 23 LONG YEARS IN OPPOSITION - AND, WHO IN DOING SO, SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED THE POLITICAL AGENDA OF AUSTRALIA - SOME (INCLUDING FREUDY) EVEN SAY, CHANGED THE WAY WE SPEAK.

AND BECAUSE OF THOSE THINGS, WE ARE ENTITLED TO CELEBRATE TODAY THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY ITSELF - DEVASTED TEN YEARS AGO, TODAY ASCENDANT THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA.

AND WE CAN NOW SEE THAT THE RESILIENCE WHICH MADE THAT RESURGENCE POSSIBLE, IS AS MUCH PART OF THE WHITLAM LEGACY AS ANYTHING ELSE, BECAUSE THE VERY FOUNDATION OF THE PARTY'S CAPACITY TO SERVE LAY VERY MUCH IN GOUGH'S WORK OF REFORMATION, RE-EDUCATION, AND RECONSTRUCTION, DURING HIS LEADERSHIP.

I THINK THERE IS A SIMPLE MEASURE OF GOUGH WHITLAM'S PLACE IN MODERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY. IN THE DECADE UP TO 1966, ONE FIGURE ABSOLUTELY DOMINATED AUSTRALIAN POLITICS. THAT WAS, OF COURSE, SIR ROBERT MENZIES.

THE NEXT DECADE WAS DOMINATED BY GOUGH WHITLAM

MENZIES, SECOND TIME AROUND, WAS PRIME MINISTER FOR SIXTEEN YEAR; GOUGH FOR JUST UNDER THREE.

YET WHO TODAY, IN TERMS OF POSITIVE ACHIEVEMENT, IN TERMS OF CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE, IN TERMS OF CHANGES AND REFORMS AFFECTING THE WAY WE LIVE AND THE OPPORTUNITIES WE CAN NOW ENJOY, COULD PUT MENZIES IN THE SAME LEAGUE AS WHITLAM?

AND I THINK IT IS SIGNIFICANT. IN THIS REGARD, THAT WHILE MANY BOOKS HAVE ALREADY BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT EVERY ASPECT OF THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT AND THE WHITLAM YEARS - AND TODAY SEES THE PUBLICATION OF GOUGH'S VERY DEFINITIVE ACCOUNT - WE STILL AWAIT, NOT ONLY THE OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY, BUT ANY SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNT AT ALL OF THE MENZIES ERA, NEARLY TWENTY YEARS AFTER HIS DEPARTURE.

THIS BOOK IS UNIQUE IN MANY WAYS. GOUGH IS NOT BY ANY MEANS THE FIRST FORMER AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER TO HAVE WRITTEN BOOKS: DEAKIN, HUGHES, PAGE, FADDEN AND MENZIES HIMSELF COME TO MIND. BILLY, I UNDERSTAND, IS UP TO HIS THREE MILLIONTH WORD.

BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME A FORMER AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER HAS SERIOUSLY ATTEMPTED TO GIVE A FULL AND SERIOUS ACCOUNT OF HIS STEWARDSHIP.

AND THAT IS WHY, AS GOUGH EXPLAINS IN HIS INTRODUCTION, THIS BOOK CONCENTRATES ON POLICY, ITS DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION.

THIS IS NOT THE OCCASION OR THE PLACE TO DISCUSS THESE POLICIES, OR THEIR DEVELOPMENT OR IMPLEMENTATION. HOWEVER, I WOULD LIKE, BRIEFLY, TO DRAW PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO SOME OF YOUR GOVERNMENT'S REFORMS, REFORMS WHICH HAVE ENDURED, AND REFORMS WHICH ARE INTEGRAL TO THIS LABOR GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES.

YOUR PIONEERING OF THE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA IN 1971 WAS ONE OF THE MOST INSPIRED AND INSPIRING EXAMPLES OF POLITICAL VISION IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY.

THE FRASER GOVERNMENT CONTINUED YOUR PATHBREAKING WORK IN CHINA - AND WE HAVE VERY CONSIDERABLY AND ENDURINGLY BUILT UPON THAT SOLID FOUNDATION.

THE EFFORTS WHICH YOUR GOVERNMENT MADE TO ENHANCE AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH SOUTHEAST ASIA HAVE GIVEN OUR GOVERNMENT A BASIS FOR WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE ASEAN COUNTRIES, AND SEEKING TO FACILITATE A SETTLEMENT TO THE TRAGIC CAMBODIAN CONFLICT.

IT WAS YOUR GOVERNMENT WHICH GAVE AUSTRALIA DECENT AND ACCEPTABLE POLICIES TOWARDS SOUTH AFRICA. THE FRASER GOVERNMENT TOOK YOUR LEAD AND MADE AUSTRALIA'S APPROACH BI-PARTISAN.

AND YOUR ROLE, FIRST IN COURAGEOUSLY CHANGING AUSTRALIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS PAPUA NEW GUINEA INDEPENDENCE FROM OPPOSITION AND THEN IN SEEING IT TO FRUITION FROM GOVERNMENT, HAS ALSO BEEN OF ENORMOUS INFLUENCE IN CREATING A HEALTHIER REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT FROM WHICH SUCCESSOR GOVERNMENTS IN AUSTRALIA HAVE BENEFITTED.

AND ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT SO MANY REFORMS WERE INITIATED. BUT LET ME MENTION ONE - MEDIBANK. DESPITE FRASER'S PROMISE IN THE 1975 ELECTION TO RETAIN MEDIBANK, IT WAS ALL BUT DISMANTLED WHEN WE CAME TO OFFICE.

BUT WE WERE DETERMINED AND COMMITTED TO RESTORE LABOR'S HEALTH POLICIES. AND WE HAVE.

THE PRINCIPLE - EMBODIED IN MEDIBANK - THAT EVERY AUSTRALIAN HAS THE RIGHT TO THE VERY BEST AVAILABLE HEALTH AND HOSPITAL CARE ACCORDING TO NEED IS NOW, BY OUR ACTION, EMBODIED IN MEDICARE.

MEDICARE IS ONE OF MY GOVERNMENT'S MOST SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL REFORMS. MEDICARE'S UNIVERSAL HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE HAS BROUGHT TO AN END THE UNACCEPTABLE SITUATION WHERE UNDER THE CONSERVATIVES OVER TWO MILLION POOR AND DISADVANTAGED AUSTRALIANS WERE WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE.

AS I HAVE SAID, THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT POLICY AND NOT ABOUT INTRIGUE OR INFIGHTING. ITS APPROACH AND CONTENT REPRESENT THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH THAT THE CENTRAL WORK OF GOVERNMENT IS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY.

AND AS GOUGH POINTS OUT, IN THE CASE OF THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT, EVEN WHEN IT WAS BEING DEPICTED AS BEING PARALYSED BY INTERNAL CRISES AND TURMOIL, THE REAL WORK OF GOVERNMENT WAS BEING CARRIED ON TO THE END.

BUT THE TRAGEDY OF YOUR TIME WAS THAT WHILE THIS WAS BEING DONE, EVENTS AND INDIVIDUALS WERE CONSPIRING TO BRING YOUR GOVERNMENT TO A PREMATURE END.

AND ON THIS DAY - 10 YEARS LATER - I WOULD WISH SIMPLY TO MAKE THESE POINTS ABOUT THOSE EVENTS AND THOSE INDIVIDUALS.

THE CONSERVATIVE FIGURES AND FORCES WHOSE ACTIONS CULMINATED IN THE DISMISSAL ENGAGED IN THE MOST MASSIVE EXERCISE IN HYPOCRISY IN THE HISTORY OF THIS COUNTRY. THE TRADITIONAL ESPONSERS, DEFENDERS OF LAW AND ORDER, INVOLVED THEMSELVES IN THE SMASHING OF THE VERY CONVENTIONS UNDER WHICH OUR SOCIETY HAD OPERATED FOR 75 YEARS.

I CANNOT CONDONE AND DO NOT FORGET THE ROLES PLAYED BY THE PRINCIPALS, INCLUDING THAT BY MALCOLM FRASER AND THE LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTY.

WE SHOULD REMEMBER THESE THINGS. WE SHOULD COMMIT OURSELVES TO ENSURING THEY DO NOT OCCUR AGAIN. BUT WE SHOULD NOT DWELL WITH HATRED UPON THE PAST.

BUT, FOR THE MOMENT, BACK TO THE BOOK.

MUCH OF THE UNIQUENESS OF THIS BOOK COMES FROM THE UNIQUENESS OF ITS AUTHOR.

IT IS ALL THAT YOU WOULD EXPECT.

IT IS IN EVERY SENSE A BIG BOOK.

IT IS LUCID, FRANK AND DIRECT; THERE ARE PLENTY OF CRITICISMS BUT, I THINK, LITTLE VINDICTIVENESS OR RANCOUR. THERE IS OF COURSE, NO FALSE MODESTY - AND WHY SHOULD THERE BE?

AND I SUPPOSE THE MOST REMARKABLE THING ABOUT THIS BOOK, WHILE IT IS AN ACCOUNT AND A REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST, IS THAT IT IS ESSENTIALLY A BOOK ABOUT THE FUTURE - ABOUT THE PARTY'S FUTURE, ABOUT AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE.

THEREFORE WE CAN ALL BE GRATEFUL TO GOUGH FOR THIS UNIQUE BOOK, JUST AS WE ARE ALL DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO HIM FOR HIS MAGNIFICENT AND UNIQUE CAREER.

AND ON THIS DAY, 11 NOVEMBER, AS I HAVE SAID, WE OF THE LABOR PARTY CAN BE ESPECIALLY GRATEFUL THAT THROUGH THE PUBLICATION OF THIS BOOK AND EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, ALL THAT THIS BOOK REPRESENTS AND STANDS FOR - THE ACHIEVEMENT IT RECORDS, THE LESSON IT TEACHES - THIS DAY IS A DAY OF CELEBRATION.

WE CAN ALL TODAY CELEBRATE THE PARTY, THE NATION, THE EVENT, THE MAN.

GOUGH, IN 1942 ROOSEVELT WROTE TO CHURCHILL THAT IT WAS FUN TO BE IN THE SAME DECADE WITH HIM.

I CAN TRULY SAY THAT FOR ALL OUR UPS AND DOWNS - AND THERE WERE A FEW IT WAS FUN BEING WITH YOU IN THE SAME DECADE THAT WE WERE TOGETHER AS THE LEADERS OF THE POLITICAL AND INDUSTRIAL WINGS OF OUR MOVEMENT. IT WAS MORE THAN FUN. IT WAS GREAT.

AND THE CATACLYSM OF 11 NOVEMBER 1975 DID NOT STOP THE FUN OF BEING WITH YOU IN THE LAST DECADE.

AND THE COMPLETION OF THIS FABRIGIOUS WORK BY SOMEONE IN HIS
SEVENTIETH YEAR IS ITSELF A GUARENTEE OF A LOT MORE FUN -
TOGETHER - IN THE DECADE TO COME.
