



# PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

LAUNCH OF PETER WILENSKI'S BOOK  
"PUBLIC POWER AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION"  
CANBERRA - 14 OCTOBER 1986

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I should first congratulate the publishers - Hale and Iremonger, together with the Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration - on the remarkable timing of this venture.

It really is forward planning at its best.

Because, here is a book called Public Power and Public Administration being published at a time when its subject goes to the very heart of the contemporary public debate in our country.

Furthermore, it arrives less than three weeks after I announced in Parliament further major reforms to the Australian Public Service.

One might almost think they had inside knowledge!

So, by any measure, it is an immensely timely book on an immensely important subject.

The timing, the theme and the author form a remarkable combination.

As to the author, I need only say there is simply nobody in Australia so well qualified to write on this subject as Peter Wilenski.

I don't mean just his academic qualifications - formidable as they are.

But, for depth, diversity and directness of involvement, Peter has, I venture to say, few peers in the area of public administration in Australia.

He has seen it from all sides.

Throughout his service, Peter has maintained a strong commitment to public service reform - the ongoing task of ensuring greater efficiency and effectiveness of the public administration in this country.

And I take this opportunity to acknowledge his splendid contribution to the work of reform which our Government has undertaken.

The success of that work is absolutely fundamental to the achievement of the wider social and economic goals of this Labor Government of Australia.

It is in this context of these wider goals that I place Peter Wilenski's book. I perhaps do not need to stress that my launching of the book does not necessarily mean that I travel comfortably with every sentiment in it.

Hugh Stretton has written a fine introduction.

And he writes:

"In the lucid argument of these essays, he confronts 'Right' pretensions of small government and enhanced public efficiency with the very different facts of 'Right' performance. He exposes the assumptions and reasoning of New Right rhetoric - and also quite a lot of Left rhetoric - without mercy."

Of course, that is why this book is so timely.

It comes at a time when there is an urgent need to subject the pretensions and panaceas of the so-called New Right to intellectual scrutiny.

The moment that is done - as soon as the rhetoric is exposed to the rigour of reason and the facts of experience - the real motives of the "New Right" become clear for all to judge.

The fact is, of course, there is nothing fundamentally new about the New Right at all. It's just the old reaction in slightly more fashionable dress.

The only thing really new is that, for the first time for forty years, the old reaction has seized the ascendancy in the councils of the major non-Labor parties of Australia.

I suggest that should be a cause for deep anxiety on the part of the great majority of non-Labor supporters - the decent, thinking Australians who were entitled to believe that the party of their choice, and its leadership, was placed firmly in the mainstream of the Australian tradition.

And to them - and indeed to the entire non-Labor leadership, in all its varying and conflicting manifestation, - I heartily commend a reading of Dr. Wilenski's book.

Let me emphasise that this is not in any way a partisan tract.

It is a genuine contribution to the public debate, written from a standpoint of deep knowledge and experience.

Its lessons are valid and relevant for Labor and non-Labor, alike.

But, of course, its main message must be to the public service itself.

It's not just a question of knowing what the Boss is thinking - though I have no doubt many might find that useful.

But the important message to be read in these pages is that the strength and effectiveness of the Australian Public Service depends very largely on public perceptions of its role and conduct.

The public service is always an easy target - and not only from the ranks of reaction.

But, in the end, its ability to resist attack will be measured by its standing with the Australian people. It will depend on the degree to which the people perceive their public service and public administration as efficient and effective, responsive and responsible.

And the reforms our Government has undertaken cannot be fully understood, unless the members of the public service themselves understand their true nature and long term purpose.

It would be a fundamental mistake to think that these reforms are merely some sort of cosmetic cost-cutting exercise, in response to Australia's present economic difficulties.

Certainly, some aspects of our measures are a necessary part of our comprehensive attack on those immediate problems.

But the higher goal remains a more efficient and effective public sector.

And it's even more than that - not only a more efficient and effective public service, but a public service perceived as such by the Australian people.

And in that perception - the trust and respect of the people - lies the enduring strength of the great Australian Public Service.

And this book itself will be a valuable contribution, both to that perception and to that strength.

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