



PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

ROBERTSON/DOBELL ELECTORATES DINNER
GOSFORD - 13 DECEMBER 1986

Federal parliamentary colleagues Barry Cohen and Michael Lee,
Ladies and gentlemen.

Around the middle of next year we will have cause to celebrate
the achievement of a new milestone in this Government's history.

It is probably putting it too high to assert that this milestone
is of international or even national importance. But it is
certainly of considerable significance to the people of Gosford
and district and I could not let slip this opportunity to mention
it tonight.

As I'm sure you all know, Barry Cohen was first elected to
Parliament as the Member for Robertson in 1969.

In the years that have intervened all of us in the Labor Party
nationally and in the electorate of Robertson have had cause to
be grateful that he chose politics in favour of the glittering
promise of life of the pro golfing circuit.

In those years since 1969, Barry Cohen has given the electors of
Robertson great service.

And as the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Environment he is
giving great service to the Federal Government.

Now about this milestone: next August, Barry Cohen will become
this electorate's longest serving member.

The electorate of Robertson was one of the original seats in the
first Federal Parliament of 1901. Before Barry Cohen, only one
member for Robertson - and a conservative at that - had lasted
more than 17 years. Next July, that record tumbles.

So tonight, perhaps a little prematurely but nonetheless
sincerely, I want to congratulate Barry on setting a new
parliamentary record.

Just as importantly, the electors of Robertson deserve praise for
their political wisdom and consistency in electing and
re-electing him over the years.

There is an appropriate symmetry in this dinner being held jointly by the ALP branches in the electorates of Robertson and Dobell.

For Robertson, as I have said, is one the oldest electorates in Parliament while Dobell is one of the newest, having been created in the 1984 redistribution.

And Barry Cohen is one of the longer serving members of the ALP's parliamentary wing while Michael Lee, the member for Dobell, is one of the newest and youngest.

I want to say that in his first term in Federal Parliament Michael Lee has proven himself a very articulate and effective representative of his electorate.

His presence, and the presence of so many other young and able Labor Party members, both inside and outside the Federal parliament, I believe guarantees a bright future for our Party.

There is of course every reason for us to be confident that the Labor Party will continue to offer Australia effective and relevant leadership for many years to come.

Look at our track record - and look at the alternative offered by the Liberals.

Our track record is one of achievement and continuing reform and confident economic management at a time of great economic difficulties.

Their promised alternative is instability, and a return to the Fraser/Howard formula of bashing the unemployed, dividing the community, assaulting the trade union movement and undermining our national system of Conciliation and Arbitration.

We are convinced of the merits of consultation and cooperation. They seem determined to set out once more on the rocky and barren path of confrontation.

I do not want to minimise the problems we still face as a nation in ensuring economic prosperity.

As we approach the end of 1986, we can look back on what has in many ways been a turbulent and difficult year for many Australians.

But we can look forward with a degree of cautious optimism to 1987.

The sacrifices that were forced on the nation by international economic adversity have not been in vain.

I believe there is a new spirit abroad in Australia.

- A new determination to look critically at the way we have done things in the past, so as to find ways of doing them better;

- A new willingness to seize opportunities and make the most of them for Australia; and
- Most hearteningly, a new recognition that all of us - business, governments, wage earners - have to do with less for a time in order to spread fairly the burden of adjustment now, and to set the best basis for secure economic growth.

And that is why I have been saying these past weeks that we can enter 1987 with cautious optimism.

The foundations have been laid over the past three and a half years. Now with the sharp realignment of the currency, we are able to emerge from a period of turbulence into a period of renewed competitiveness. Barring unforeseen external factors, and, I must stress, given continued restraint, Australia can restore its long term economic stability and prosperity.

This process of readjustment is not an easy transition for Australia.

But I take comfort from the certain knowledge that a Labor Government is equipped to manage this readjustment in a compassionate and caring fashion.

I take no great pleasure as a Labor Prime Minister from deliberating in the Cabinet room on ways of cutting back Federal expenditure. As a former trade union leader I take no great joy from presiding over a period of real wages decline.

It would have been easier if we could have said yes to all the programs and projects we wanted to get off the ground.

There would have been more short-term political gain in pretending - as conservative governments in this country for decades pretended - that Australia could prosper without hard work.

But responsibly, we could not have side-stepped the need for tough decisions.

We accepted the unpalatable but necessary disciplines in wage fixing, monetary policy and in the budget.

And we set about the task of reorienting the nation's economic institutions and fostering the growth of dynamic, outward-looking industries which can take on the world's best and win.

But in the process we have not forgotten our obligation to protect the underdog and those who have traditionally looked to our Party for help and security.

We have created 670,000 new jobs since coming to office.

We have assisted more than 200,000 people to buy their own homes.

We have lifted funds for public housing by 42 per cent in real terms.

We have encouraged more children to improve their qualifications by staying at school rather than prematurely joining the work force.

We have brought in a better and fairer health insurance system.

And we have reformed the taxation system to make it more equitable and more efficient.

We have not - as would our opponents if, God forbid, they were in office - deliberately fuelled unemployment, or favoured the well-heeled special interest groups, or allowed the sharp tax avoiders to rot the taxation system.

We have not followed the prescription of the Leader of the Opposition in advocating an 18 month wage freeze. Nor have we supported his position in 18 of the last 20 National Wage Cases that there be no increase at all in wages.

Only last week we were treated to a bitter insight into the methods of the Liberal Party and their ideological outriders in the New Right.

An article in Business Review Weekly finally lifted the lid on the scandal that is the Liberal Party's industrial relations policy.

According to that magazine, a coterie of New Right members and fringe supporters is working hand-in-glove with the Liberal leadership to produce a policy that is the most radical set of changes ever contemplated to our national system of industrial relations.

The New Right treats the Liberal Party with breathtaking disdain, as is illustrated by one comment from a small business leader. He is quoted by this magazine as saying:

"We say to Brown" - that is Neil Brown, the Liberals' industrial relations spokesman - " 'How's that policy going? Have you toughened up the wimps in the party room yet?'"

This genial figure is quoted further as saying: "If we are going to support the policy we want to see it."

And he admits: "I go to Brown's office and he comes to mine. And I talk to Howard if I think Brown's not helping us. A word in the right place often does wonders."

The Liberal Party it seems, is so lacking in political wit and wisdom that it is willing to abdicate its responsibility for policy formulation to outsiders - outsiders whose views of industrial relations are so far removed from the real world that the Confederation of Australian Industry castigates them for indulging in what it called "escapist fantasies".

We saw further evidence of this rampant escapism when the so-called Australian Federation of Employers presented its submission to the National Wage Case this week.

It called for a basic wage of \$171.30 a week - a brilliant proposal indeed which would put basic wage earners actually below the poverty line!

Well a word in the right place does often do wonders. And the word the Liberals should utter now is "No" to this appalling proposal. If the Liberals were truly concerned about the welfare of the Australian family, they would dissociate themselves from this proposal, as it would place millions of Australian families in financial jeopardy.

But they have been silent - perhaps through fear of upsetting that coterie of outsiders writing their industrial relations policy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have said that we can approach the coming year with cautious optimism as far as the economy is concerned.

There are still tremendous difficulties ahead - indeed for a long time ahead.

There will still be the need for tough decisions.

There will still be a need for restraint.

But the qualities of maturity and willingness to adjust which the Australian people displayed during 1986 provides the firmest possible foundations for my confidence about putting our record before them.

I have no reservations, no doubts, no inhibitions, about the capacity of the Australian people to make a sound judgement when the time comes about their government, about the alternative and about the future they want for themselves and their families.
