



PRIME MINISTER

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
10TH ANNIVERSARY OF
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ALP WOMEN'S POLICY COMMITTEE
ADELAIDE - 21 MAY 1989

South Australian women have always held a special place in the history of women's struggle for equality of opportunity in this country.

In 1894 - ninety five years ago - the women of South Australia became the first in this nation and, after New Zealanders, the first in the world, to win the right to vote.

Today we celebrate a more recent anniversary, but one which in its way is also of great significance to the women of this State: the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the South Australian ALP Women's Policy Committee.

For the last decade this Committee has encouraged women to voice their concerns - to exercise their rights - to get involved in policy development - to work for the enhanced status of all women - and to achieve their legitimate expectations for social justice and for equality of opportunity.

No one looking at South Australia today - no one looking at this audience today - could deny the outstanding contributions to political life being made by South Australian women.

With three women in the Cabinet, one of them having been the first woman President of the Legislative Council, and a dynamic contingent of women in the Party, South Australia provides a model of what can be achieved where there is the will and the capacity to do so.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those women who have worked towards these goals over the last decade on the South Australian ALP Women's Policy Committee - and in particular I recognise Rosemary Crowley for her major role over the years both as a member of the Committee and, more recently but no less effectively, as a member of the Australian Senate.

Labor of course has a proud record of encouraging the aspirations of individual women to contribute to the political process.

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We can all be proud that when, last Thursday, Premiers and Chief Ministers from around Australia gathered in Canberra for the annual Premiers' Conference, there was for the first time a woman among them - Rosemary Follett, Labor's Chief Minister in the new ACT Government.

In Victoria, the Cain Government is the first in Australia to have appointed a woman as its deputy leader - Joan Kirner.

And in Canberra, the Government I have the honour of leading has been immeasurably strengthened by the contribution of women serving at Cabinet and Ministry level - Susan Ryan, and now Ros Kelly and Margaret Reynolds, who is my Minister Assisting on the Status of Women.

Indeed throughout the Labor Party, at Government level and right through to the branches, women are actively and constructively involved in every aspect of policy making.

But in a sense more important than the role in the Labor Party of individual women is the commitment of the Labor Party to all women - to their equality of opportunity and to their economic security.

The progress we have made at a Federal level over the past six years in raising the economic and social status of women has been unprecedented.

We have striven to create an Australia which offers social justice for all.

We have improved the status of women by enhancing economic security and independence, social justice, freedom from discrimination and equality of opportunity in all spheres of activity.

Most of all, we have recognised that the best way towards improving the lot of women begins by listening to them.

We have based our policies and programs on the needs which have been expressed to us from women around the country - the young and the elderly, the healthy and the disabled, urban women, rural women, women in the paid workforce and women at home, women of Aboriginal and immigrant backgrounds.

The Government's National Agenda for Women - our blueprint for raising the status of Australian women to the year 2000 - has been based on more than two years of consultation with some 25,000 women around the country. The National Agenda is by far the most comprehensive and progressive strategy for women ever produced by an Australian Government or political party.

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Indeed, because we are the first Government to have developed a comprehensive policy document based on the United Nations' Forward Looking Strategies for Women, we can claim our National Agenda puts us in the first rank of nations acting on the status of women.

This Government has had to face difficult economic times. That's a fact. And we have been prepared to make the tough decisions necessary to start turning that situation around.

It is not surprising that during such a period of economic adjustment, Australian women have taken an increasing interest in economic issues.

I am pleased to be able to say that in spite of the difficulties of our times, the position of women has improved considerably under this Government.

Let me give you the proof of that.

First, over the six years we have been in office we have created some 1.4 million new jobs, and we have cut the unemployment rate to a seven-year low of 6.1 per cent.

Around 60 per cent of those 1.4 million new jobs created under Labor have gone to women - that means around 750,000 jobs.

Women's unemployment rate has dropped from 10.4 per cent to 6.7 per cent over the same period.

The latest labour force figures show that just over half - 50.5 per cent - of all women are now participating in the Australian labour force, a stark comparison with the 44.5 per cent participation rate when we came to office.

At the same time, we have been concerned with improving the quality of employment prospects and conditions for women.

We have enacted three major pieces of legislation for affirmative action and equal employment opportunity programs, giving women equal opportunity and greater freedom from discrimination in employment.

I comment in passing how disappointed I was to see that the new Opposition front bench appointed by Andrew Peacock failed to find room for Senator Peter Baume. Senator Baume, I am sure you recall, resigned from the front bench in 1987 over the Opposition's decision not to support a vital part of our equal employment opportunity legislation. In crossing the floor to support the Government, Peter Baume made a very important protest in defence of a vital principle and his exclusion from the Shadow Ministry shows he is still paying a very high price for that action.

Second, this Government is proud of its achievements in increasing the access to and quality of education and training for women.

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We have dramatically lifted the number of schoolboys and girls who stay on at school to Year 12. Where fewer than four in ten girls were completing Year 12 before we came to office, now more than six in ten do so, and this level continues to rise.

Under the National Policy for the Education of Girls, the first such national education policy, all Commonwealth, State and private educational institutions are following specified objectives to improve the performance of girls at school.

We have also taken innovative steps to increase the access of young women to vocational training. The proportion of women enrolled in vocational and preparatory courses in TAFE has increased from 39 per cent in 1981 to 47 per cent in 1986.

More than 70 per cent of those participating in the Australian traineeship system are young women.

The Government places a very high priority on measures to assist women to achieve economic independence. In a new approach, the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) initiative provides sole parents, the majority of whom are women, with the opportunity to gain the skills necessary for successful workforce entry.

Third, and inextricably linked to the economic independence of women, is the issue of childcare. Again, we have a proud story to tell.

Fulfilling the commitment set in the National Agenda for Women, we are committed to the provision of quality and affordable child care. In any given week, some 132,000 Australian families benefit from our child care services.

The National Child Care Strategy we announced in the last Budget will provide 30,000 new child care places over the next three years.

The strategy includes incentives to encourage industry to invest in the provision of child care for their employees.

I am pleased to announce today that my Government and John Bannon's have just reached an agreement to provide more child care places in South Australia.

It's a three year agreement that will provide nearly 2,500 new child care places in the State - most of them providing care outside school-hours, providing real assistance to working parents of school children.

By 1992, a total of 98,000 additional childcare places will have been funded by this Government - a trebling of places since we took office in 1983.

Fourth, we have extended unprecedented assistance to women on low incomes.

The Government has offered relief to women on pensions and benefits or earning low incomes through the historic Family Allowance Supplement; the establishment of the Child Support Agency and, of course, the package of measures announced in the Treasurer's April Statement.

Tax cuts, particularly the reduction of the lower rates, will benefit many women workers. Dramatic increases in Family Allowance payments, additional payments for families in receipt of the Family Allowance Supplement and further assistance for one income families will all contribute to the improvement in lifestyle of a large number of Australian women.

Finally, let me touch on two recent initiatives to improve the status of women.

Early last month I launched Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The Government has allocated \$1.6 million over three years to change community attitudes towards this tragic and inexcusable blight on our society.

Also in April I launched the National Women's Health Policy, developed after consultation with more than one million Australian women. Good health and safety are fundamental elements of any woman's well being.

I have given a personal commitment that the National Women's Health Policy will receive very close and sympathetic attention from Federal Cabinet in the 1989-90 Budget process.

Both these April initiatives are of major importance in the Government's overall strategy for women.

Having outlined today the breadth of this Government's achievements for women, may I conclude by reaffirming this vital fact. Measures adopted to improve the standing of women, as important as they are to the women who directly receive them, also benefit, in an essential and concrete fashion, the entire population. In particular they benefit Australian families.

Lifting the status of Australian women, widening their opportunities in the workforce, improving their conditions at home, affording them better health and better access to services, is the sensible approach for this country.

It's in a real sense the only approach for this country.

And let me assure you that the achievements of the past in no way obscure our recognition of the hard work that still needs to be done. We cannot afford to be complacent or to ignore the injustices and obstacles that Australian women confront every day.

Our goal is clear. Every Australian woman deserves a say, a choice and a fair go.

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The tireless work of organisations such as the ALP Women's Policy Committee in South Australia will ensure that Labor Governments, on a State and Federal level will keep in touch with, and respond to, the needs of Australian women.
