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PRIME MINISTER

PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH DURING RECEIPT OF POSTCARDS FROM CHILDREN INVOLVED IN THE BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE'S NATIONAL PROMISE THE CHILDREN ACTION ON CHILD POVERTY CAMPAIGN, MURAL HALL, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, 22 JUNE 1990

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

PM: Let me conclude on a more general point about the motivation of politicians and the rationale of social justice programs such as we're discussing today and I want to be very direct in some of the things I'm about to say. It's very easy, very easy indeed to adopt a fashionable cynicism about politicians and to assume that they will only do something if they are pushed into it. That's an attitude which I see underlines these postcards where you make the claim, that is the Brotherhood makes the claim, and let me read it. I quote - all politicians will only do something about it if they feel they have to at election time, for instance. Now, let me say to the Brotherhood quite deliberately, that I think that's a cheap shot. It may make you feel good to make a statement like that, but without any beating around the bush, let it be understood that that statement is a false statement and an abundantly false statement. More directly it's an un-Christian statement. There is no foundation for it. I can tell you that speaking for myself that's not my attitude to social justice and it's not my attitude to what politics is about and I don't often presume to speak for John Hewson or Senator Macklin, but I know that it's not their attitude. It's a cheap shot, it's an untrue statement, it's an un-Christian statement. I think any closer analysis of the new services we have delivered to disadvantaged Australians would show that they haven't been based on a judgement that there may be votes in them. Instead they have been part of an overall strategy from day one of change based on a fundamental analysis of who really is in need in this community. Let me be quite specific. The reason that we can afford to be spending in this financial year, as we are, over \$2 billion on kids in low income families - the only reason why we can afford to be doing that and are doing it - is on the basis that we have decided to spend less money on those who are better off. And I remind you that that has meant taking benefits away from people. It's meant levying new taxes on those who hadn't been paying their fair share. In other words, we've made some tough decisions. We've made

some very unpopular decisions - decisions that cost us votes at election time. I just ask you to recall the virulent campaigns that were waged against us in the media and I'm not talking about political opponents, I'm not trying to make a political issue, I'm talking about the campaigns that were waged in media and elsewhere. But remember those virulent campaigns that were waged against us on the assets test, the fringe benefits tax and the capital gains tax. Those weren't politically popular - they cost us votes, they were on the basis of believing that benefits were being paid to those who didn't need them and we wanted the financial capacity to pay more to those who needed more. We made those decisions because we believe they were the right decisions to make. I think at the end of the day you would agree that it is a far better rationale for decision making than any ... responsiveness to lobbying campaign whether expressed for postcards or by any other means. And so I hope I can stand and join with my political colleagues here. We have our disagreements about needs, we have disagreements on philosophy, but I hope I speak for them in saying we reject the cheap shot that all politicians, all politicians, will only do something about it if they feel they have to, at election time for instance. I can assure you in conclusion that my Government has worked and will continue to work to improve the circumstances of the disadvantaged in our community. We know in the nature of things that neither my Government, or if some day it's Dr Hewson's government or someone else's government, we know that we will never be able to do everything that everyone in the community wants. But I can say to you that as far as this Government is concerned we're proud to look at the record and will continue to work to improve, as I say, the circumstances of the disadvantaged in our community. But obviously in these things and this is a truth reflected in your concern, a government cannot do it single-handedly. The contribution made by the many community organisations notable, may I say, among them the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Council for Social Service, those contributions are crucial. I commend you for the work that you've done, I commend you for your concern and I wish you continued success in your work. I hope that in future your observations about the motivations of all politicians will be somewhat more accurate.

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