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PRIME MINISTER

PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH. OPENING OF BOB CATLEY'S ELECTORATE OFFICE, SEFTON PARK, ADELAIDE, 23 JUNE 1990

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

Now ladies and gentlemen, it would be appropriate, as I'm opening the office of a local Member just to say something about a couple of things that happened yesterday. A few discussions I had with my friend Bishop Peter Hollingworth. Let me say, I use the word friend advisedly because I'm amazed that I'm told by my Press Officer that one of the, the television stations last night and they're quite remarkable how they manufacture news, said that after a few words we had together I then commanded the Archbishop to come to my office. The truth is, my friends, is that we had a prior appointment which he'd arranged, which he'd requested to meet me in my office and when we finished we walked out amicably together. We had a very, very amicable discussion and we parted, as we went in, as very good friends.

But it is important that I go to the issue of what I was talking about yesterday because it couldn't be more relevant than it is in opening the office of a Member of Parliament. The words that upset me yesterday were not words that upset me in regards to myself personally. Now I just remind you what the words were. They were these - all politicians will only do something about it, that's child poverty, all politicians will only do something about it if they feel they have to at election time, for instance.

Now ladies and gentlemen, I thought that yesterday I had an obligation, as Prime Minister of this country, to speak up for all politicians because I think that one of the great dangers in our democracy is the way in which politicians, as a class, are denegated. It is easy, extraordinarily easy to have the cheap shot at politicians. Very, very easy but I want to say to you and my remarks are not only directed to Labor Members of Parliament - we have our ideological, philosophical differences with our opponents, but by and large what I say of my own Members I will say of Members of the Opposition as individual Members of Parliament - they are hard-working.

There's no great glamour or joy for your ordinary Member of Parliament, particularly those in relatively marginal seats. They have unceasing demands upon their time. You all know that it is not a financially well rewarding vocation. Bob Catley will undoubtedly be worse off financially in net terms as a representative here of this seat of Adelaide than he would have been if he'd continued what he was doing before. And that is true, that is true I think for the majority of Members of Parliament, that they could be getting higher remuneration elsewhere.

But the point I'm making, my friends, is this. I believe that the Australian society is in danger of being a less efficient, a less cohesive, a less productive society if we encourage and allow, without comment, the cheap shots at the politician. And I say that not just of members of my Party and I was not speaking yesterday just for Labor members. I simply think it is not the case that members of Parliament will only do the right thing if they are pushed to do it and particularly at election time. I say this of Members of Parliament across the spectrum, although I have deep philosophical differences with those on the other side, but in regard to the overwhelming majority of individual Parliamentarians, be they in the Labor Party, the Liberal Party, the National Party or the Democrats, that they do have a sense of commitment and public service. They do not get great rewards, they have enormous demands upon their times, their families as well are subject to enormous pressures and you will find that ... you already found it out now.

And what I was about therefore yesterday, my friends, was not some defence of the Government's policy, but trying to say something which I think is important. If we're going to have the best sort of society we can where we cherish and nurture the concept of Parliamentary democracy, then let's make sure that we recognise the discharge of the obligations by politicians of the great responsibilities they have upon them. And may I say, without going to confidences in the discussions I had with Peter afterwards, he acknowledged the validity of what I was saying and the right that I had to put it. So I just want to make it clear, that's what my concern was.

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