

EMBARGO: 730 p.m.

NATIONAL BROADCAST BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
TUESDAY, 16 APRIL 1974

On 18 May we Australians will take part in an historic expression of the will of the people. There is to be an election for both Houses of the national Parliament, for the House of Representatives and for the whole of the Senate. Further, you are being asked to approve certain proposals to enshrine in the Australian Constitution some basic democratic guarantees. I freely acknowledge the burden of decision all these matters impose upon you. In the next four weeks I shall be asking you all to think deeply on the profound issues involved. And on 18 May I shall ask you to spend 5 minutes in the voting booth - 5 minutes for the future of Australia.

Tonight I want simply to tell you how the present situation has come about - how the Government you elected less than 1½ years ago was robbed of the power to govern effectively by senators you elected, some 3½ years ago and others 6½ years ago. It is now clear that these senators and our opponents in general - the innumerable parties and factions which make up the Opposition and presumably represent the alternative government - never really accepted your verdict of 2 December 1972. They were never prepared to give our government a fair go, a chance to carry out the program you endorsed. The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate let the cat out of the bag well and truly last Wednesday when he stated that the Opposition in the Senate embarked on a course some 12 months ago to bring about a House of Representatives election. And as early as April a year ago, they first threatened to put this decision into effect by rejecting a money bill. In each of the three sessions of the 28th Parliament, the threat has been made. It was made good at last on Wednesday.

A chance majority in the Senate - a majority reflecting decisions you made in elections in 1967 and 1970 - put into their hands a powerful weapon to bring about the end of the Government you elected only 17 months ago. In the five weeks the Australian Parliament has sat this year the Liberals, the Country Party and the D.L.P. have combined to defeat the Government on 42 out of the 43 occasions when votes were taken in the Senate. Many bills the senators rejected or stalled or sabotaged were crucial parts of the program I put to you in the election campaign of 1972.

You, the people, will now be able to use the rights which the Constitution gives to settle many of the matters upon which the Senate has twice rejected bills passed by the House of Representatives.

Four of these bills were for referendums to alter the Constitution. The Senate opposed your having a vote on any of these issues, even those recommended as far back as 1958. But where the Senate twice rejects referendum proposals, the Constitution gives you, the people, the right to vote on them regardless.

Then there are the six bills on which the Governor-General has said that the Government was entitled to have a dissolution of both the Houses. Two of these bills were to fulfil the program of universal health insurance which I put to the people in 1969 and 1970 and 1972. Another was to establish the Petroleum and Minerals Authority; it will give Australians a share in the control and ownership of those resources which hitherto the taxpayer has spent over \$50 million a year in subsidising investors to discover and keep. By your votes you can assure the passage of these measures.

There are another nine bills which the Senate has rejected, all bills which we promised at the last elections to introduce. I shall specify two of them, both of which, remarkably enough, had been originally introduced by Liberal or Country Party ministers. One of the bills was to extend the Trade Practices legislation, first conceived by Sir Garfield Barwick in 1962 and introduced by Mr Snedden in 1965; my government proposed to outlaw price fixing by collusion between companies. Three times since September the Senate has refused even to debate this bill. Another bill was to expand the resources of the Australian Industry Development Corporation in order to increase the proportion of Australian ownership in important national industries; this the Senate shelved.

Thus, step by step, month by month, our opponents established a pattern of obstruction and violence to our legislative program. But until last week they balked at the ultimate obstruction, the refusal to supply the Government with the money it needs to govern. Sure they had threatened it 3 times, but backed away at the crunch. Well might they hesitate on the brink of such a constitutional disaster. A basic principle of democracy is that the control over the people's money must lie firmly in the people's House, the House of Representatives. This is why those who command a majority in the people's House form the Government of the country, whether or not they have a majority in the Senate. No less an authority than Sir Robert Menzies has properly branded such action by the Senate as a falsification of democracy. Yet such were the depths of their bitterness, their resentment at your refusal to trust them any longer with your affairs - that they were prepared to do this: last week they did it.

Accordingly, I had no choice but to ask the Governor-General to dissolve a Parliament which had become unworkable, a Parliament in which the fundamental conditions for effective responsible government of this country had ceased to exist. And so on this matter, in Sir Paul Hasluck's own words in reply to my request, the people of Australia are to pass their judgement on 18 May. We are to have a fresh parliament, a contemporary parliament, a parliament which will reflect the wishes and the hopes of the Australian people in 1974, a parliament which no longer will be dominated by the men of yesterday.

Despite the Senate obstruction of the past 16 months, the Government you elected for 3 years in 1972 has succeeded in carrying out to a remarkable, unprecedented extent the pledges we gave to you. I venture to say that no elected Government in modern history has so promptly, so amply fulfilled so much of its undertaking. It has been a Government of achievement, purpose and vigour. Australia never stood so high in the world. At home the herculean task of clearing away the accumulated dead wood of 23 years has been set in train with vigor and compassion. Our schools have been given a new deal. The whole system of social welfare is being transformed. We have begun with a will to rebuild our existing cities and build new ones.

What is the alternative to our record? The men who never really accepted your decision of 1972 now ask you to reverse that decision. They offer you no policies, no believable policies. Their leader dares not unveil his own party's supposed platform. He makes vague promises about tax cuts which are promptly repudiated by his master, the Leader of the Country Party. The man who as Treasurer, produced Australia's worst unemployment for a decade, produces an economic hodge podge dragged out of him bit by contradictory bit by journalists. It has been properly described by the leading financial writers and journals of Australia as a recipe for disaster. The Opposition in reality offers only a return to the same policies, the same men, the same attitudes that you so firmly rejected in 1972. They are united in only one thing, hatred, - there is no other word for it - hatred of the Whitlam Government and indeed hatred and contempt for the people who elected us. This is a coalition of hate.

My fellow Australians, I do not conceal from you that the times ahead will require strong leadership and tough decisions. We are sharing in vast world problems which at bottom represent a crisis of confidence in democracy itself. In such times, in such a crisis, how could you conceivably trust the men who have just done such violence to Australia's own democratic process? In 1972 I came before you with the most detailed, and comprehensive program ever placed before the Australian people. In the weeks to come I will not be putting forward a new program but rather the new dimensions and the expanded fruits of the program we have been trying to implement. I seek your support in the fullest sense, not just your votes, but support and help and co-operation from you the people of Australia in the great business of leading this nation towards the fulfilment of its unlimited promise. Do not turn back; do not turn your back upon the future of Australia.
