PRESS STATEMENT:

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December 5th, 1965

TWO CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

NUMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE SENATE
AND AMENDMENT CONCERNING ABORIGINAL RIGHTS.

A short time ago the Prime Minister introduced two Bills involving
two small but important Constitutional amendments for which it is the Govern-
ment's intention to seek the support of the people some time next year.

The first Bill is designed to break what is called the nexus
between the House of Representatives and the Senate. This is a clause in
the Constitution which says that the House of Representatives shall be, as
nearly as practicable, twice the size of the Senate.

This restriction places severe limitations on what can be done
with the numbers in the House of Representatives. It, in fact, means that
if it is desired to have an increase in membership for practical reasons,
while the connection with the Senate remains, that increase must be an
extravagantly large one.

In 1949, the House of Representatives was increased from 74 to
122 members and the Senate was increased from 36 to 60. At this time, each
member of the House of Representatives represented about 66,000 people. Today,
each member represents about 94,000 people.

There is a limit to the extent to which the number of people in an
electorate can be increased without reducing the quality and calibre of the
service that a member can give to each constituent, and this is especially so
since the scope and complexity of Government is growing year by year and what
the Government does seems to touch the lives of people more nearly than in the
past.

We hope that Australia will continue to grow and I hope that, in
my lifetime, I will see an Australia of at least 20 to 25 million. This
means that we can look in reality to an increase in the numbers in the House
of Representatives.

At the present moment, five Senators come up for election every
two years. This means one Party has a possibility of getting a majority,
but if six Senators were elected every three years, it is highly likely that
we would have a permanently deadlocked Senate with three from each side. This
would make Government extraordinarily difficult.

That means that if you are going to increase the Senate you would
have to go from five to seven being elected every three years. Then one
side would have the opportunity of getting four out of the seven. If seven
Senators were being elected from each State every three years, we would have a
Senate of 84, and if we had a Senate of 84 - while the present connection with
the House of Representatives remains in the Constitution - the House of
Representatives would be 168. I, for one, would say that an increase of this
size in the House of Representatives would be unwarranted at the present point
of time, and I don't believe, in reality, that any increase is required in the
Senate.

Thus, if this particular part of the Constitution is put to break
the nexus between the House of Representatives and the Senate, it would become
possible to increase the House of Representatives by 8 or 10 or 12 or 14, and
such increases would be reasonable. The situation in the Senate would not be
affected.
The Bill that is being introduced into the Parliament on this matter also provides that each member would represent not less than 50,000 people. This would still be significantly more than the number represented in 1949 which stood at 66,000. In addition, the States' rights are protected by also suggesting that the Constitution should be amended so that the original States are entitled to no fewer than six Senators. This would prevent any reduction in the Senate from the present number.

In short, the purpose of this Constitutional amendment is to enable the House of Representatives to grow as Australia grows and as the duties devolving upon individual members of Parliament become more complex and more demanding of time and effort. It is designed so that the House of Representatives can be increased by a moderate number and not by an extravagant number, which would be the case if the Senate were forced to be expanded every time there was a wish to increase the numbers of the House of Representatives.

The Prime Minister also introduced a second Bill whose purpose was to alter the Constitution by repealing Section 127. This Section provides that, in determining the numbers of people in the Commonwealth or in a State or in Commonwealth Territories, aboriginal natives would not be counted. Such a Section is out of keeping with the sentiments of the average Australian and is certainly out of keeping with the times in which we live. Commonwealth policy is directed to see that aboriginal natives are given every opportunity, encouragement and help to take their proper place in Australian society. Only recently, the Commonwealth gave evidence before the Arbitration Court hearing the case for the Pastoral Award in the Northern Territory. For a long time, aboriginal stockmen had been paid much less than white stockmen. The Government has given evidence suggesting that aboriginal stockmen's wages should be brought up to a level equal to that of white stockmen over a period of a few years. This is just one example of Government moves to establish full and proper equality.

There is no excuse for leaving this Section in the Constitution and I certainly hope that the referendum to remove it will be fully supported by the Australian people.
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