STATEMENT BY THE HON. MALCOLM FRASER, M.P. - 31.5.73

HUMBUG AND DECEPTION

On 20 June in 1972 the present Prime Minister said on State aid that the Labor Party "will support any forms of benefit already existing." The Prime Minister was speaking of the actions the Labor Party would take when it got into government.

On 13 December the Prime Minister wrote to Mr Dixon, Chairman of the National Council of Independent Schools, and he said:

"Per capita grants to non-Government schools for the year 1973 will be paid at the rates already approved for 1973 under the provisions of that Act - that is, $62 per primary pupil and $104 per secondary pupil. Commencing in 1974 additional Commonwealth contributions towards the running costs of non-Government schools will be determined on the basis of relative need, as assessed by the Interim Committee and subsequently by the Australian Schools Commission."

Those words plainly meant that the per capita payments would continue, but that additional recommendations would be on a basis of relative need, striking at areas of particular hardship. What in fact has happened is that all Commonwealth grants for running costs, not only the additional ones, will be paid on the new basis

Those concerned with independent schools believe that these commitments of the Prime Minister were reinforced by the terms of reference of the Karmel Committee, especially by term of reference 3b, which said that grants recommended by the Interim Committee will be "in addition to existing Commonwealth commitments."

The undertakings given by the Prime Minister on more than one occasion and the plain meaning of that term of reference of the Karmel Committee was undermined by the Minister for Education's letter of April 13. Last year I constantly said that it was the Labor Party's intention to phase out per capita grants and not accept some obligation for every Australian schoolchild. This is now demonstrated fact.
The Karmel Committee on page 6 refers to the letter written by the Minister for Education. In that letter the Minister for Education clearly states that the per capita grants will be continued in 1973, but that payments beyond 1973 will be on the basis of assessments of needs and priorities. Knowing the history of the Labor Party's activities in this matter, that could only be taken as a clear direction to end the across the board per capita grants.

The Minister has in fact contradicted himself. On the one hand he wrote an unofficial letter on April 13, the plain meaning of which is a direction to end per capita grants, especially when it is coupled with the policy documents of the Labor Party, but in the Parliament on Wednesday, 30 May, he said that he believed that all schools, including Geelong Grammar, should get a basic grant, and that the Commonwealth should have an identity with the education of every child.

If the Minister for Education really believes that, he should have expressed that view in the letter he sent to the Karmel Committee, the letter which on any plain reading of the terms must indicate the Government's decision to end per capita grants on the basis of which they have been known in the past.

So we not only have Mr Whitlam's commitments publicly given, on several occasions repudiated. We have the Minister contradicting his own letter by a statement he made in the Parliament. The deception and the humbug involved in this matter will be judged for what they are. I would like to make it quite plain that the deception is Mr Whitlam's, the humbug the Minister's.
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