ELECTORAL STATEMENT BY THE HON. MALCOLM FRASER,

Last week I announced, on behalf of both the Liberal Party and the Country Party, a new employment and industrial relations policy.

Among the new initiatives in this policy we are giving much greater emphasis to improving employer/employee communication in order to prevent the development of strikes. We believe that employers ought to establish in factories and work places some permanent mechanism of their own choosing to achieve this by discussing with their employees matters such as the company's future plans, the employment effect of technological changes and promotional opportunities. We want to see employees given a greater sense of involvement and participation. They cannot be regarded as just another input in the production process.

Recently I was given an example of a particular company with a bad industrial safety record. It vastly improved that record as soon as the company asked the employees themselves what ought to be done and implemented their proposals.

We are also pledged to fight discrimination in employment where it is against women or any other group, or individual. While many women prefer to look after their homes, others who choose or are forced through inflation to go out to work must be given an equal opportunity.

We maintain the right of a person to join or not to join a union, but in a new departure for the Liberal Party and the Country Party, we are advocating positively that people should participate in their industry or professional organisations. But whatever a Government might try to do in the industrial field there must be goodwill, commonsense, restraint and understanding on both sides. Unhappily there are in Australia too many examples where this is not the case.

I mentioned the need for better communication between employees and employers. This ought to achieve a better understanding of each others' problems and improve the working environment on the shop floor. Its success is dependent on adequate information.
I want to give one example where I believe three multinational companies are acting in a way which is contrary to the interests of themselves and the union movement in Australia. The multinational companies concerned are General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. The issue involves standard times. These are the specific times which each company considers should be taken for the performance of each task on their vehicle assembly lines. The calculation of these times is a most objective and precise matter. It is also most important because they form the basis for ensuring that each employee works at about the same rate and under about the same pressure as his mates.

Of course this is an area where industrial disputes can and do occur. When they occur at the Leyland N.S.W. plant that company provides the necessary standard times information to the employees so that the matter can be responsibly discussed between management and union representatives. The Vehicle Builders Employees Federation has a dynamic leadership. To men such as those in charge of the V.B.E.F. industrial relations is a sophisticated field of endeavour. They want to discuss facts not opinion that can be bound in prejudice. At G.M.H.'s plant there has been some industrial disruption. One cause involves standard times information. G.M.H. refuses to disclose those vital standard times. Without them it is impossible to demonstrate factually that one person is not being asked to work harder than the man to the left or right of him. Ignorance, in this case denial of facts which ought to be made available encourages irresponsibility and very often prolongs and exacerbates an unnecessary industrial dispute. If Leyland can do it why can't G.M.H., Ford and Chrysler.

In fact the matter goes further. I find it offensive that these very same American corporations by agreement with American automobile workers have for more than 10 years provided this kind of standard time information to members of the American unions in a dispute situation. In other words they are prepared to make available to American unions information that they are not prepared to make available to Australian unions. In discussions I have held on the issue it has been suggested to me that the American unions are more responsible than their Australian counterparts, that American unions appreciate that greater productivity results in higher wages, that more effective work, not necessarily harder work, can benefit employees as well as employers. To that I say that if Australian unions are less responsible - and I do not know if they are - perhaps part of that irresponsibility is due to lack of information from employers. If that information were made available it might well be easier to establish arrangements which would effectively improve productivity. It is also suggested that such disclosures might result in the Arbitration Commission demanding similar information on which to base awards and that the standard times may be useful to competitors in vehicle manufacture.
I believe that proper arguments put to the Commission would not only safeguard the confidentiality of any such information given to the Commission, but that also the Commission would reject unreasonable claims to have such standard times information written into an award.

Finally, I find my support for the unions here backed in the general tenor of a report of a Committee of experts of the International Labour Organisation. It is part of the spirit of that report that multi-national companies ought not to treat trade unions in the host country in a less reasonable manner than they do in their own countries. It is not only Leylands but other industries in Australia that make the kind of information about which I have been talking available. Multi-national companies have contributed a great deal to the development of Australia and that should be acknowledged but in restricting the legitimate flow of information between employer and employee they are damaging the interests, not only of their employees and the community generally, but also of themselves.
The Liberal and Country Party have considered the events of this last week with a great deal of care and concern. Not concern for ourselves, but concern for Australia. We are in a position in which we now have firm and positive evidence that the Prime Minister is preparing to use virtually any means to gain complete control over both the Houses of Parliament. The Prime Minister has talked about a mandate, but there is also a mandate for people who have been elected to the Senate. It is my firm belief that if the Prime Minister had had a majority in the Senate over the last 18 months he and his Government would be infinitely more unpopular now than they in fact are. It is the Senate and the responsible use of the Opposition Senate majority which has prevented the worst ravages of many of the Prime Minister's proposals falling on the Australia people.

I believe people in country areas would appreciate this because most of the hostile acts which the Prime Minister has done to the country community have been done by his administration. They could not be brought into effect without Senate power to protect the country community from this Government's hostility has been greatly reduced. Other various measures which have affected the Australian community generally have required legislation and some have been passed and others modified to mitigate their worse effects. There is no need to have me remind
you of the Government's actions to the rural communities. The superphosphate decision was the last, and which confirmed the hostility. But we need to remember that we have a Government that promised low rates of interest, and interest rates for all Australians and for those seeking to buy their own home are now higher than ever. We have a Government that promised that it would not increase income tax, but by its actions it will increase its collections from income tax by $1,500 or $1,600 million this year. We have a Government that promised industrial peace, yet we have a Minister for Labour who on every occasion takes one side against the other, often making inflammatory comments which makes it much harder to get to the reasoned settlement to an industrial dispute.

We have a Government which has re-introduced shortages, in some cases black markets, because under Labor protection has not been able to keep pace with demand and many productive enterprises are held up because of shortages of essential equipment, because of shortages to basic materials.

We have a Government that has shown its complete financial irresponsibility. It is determined to spend and to spend and to spend, and it is your money they are getting rid of, and as a result the cost of a housing commission home, the cost of a school, has risen enormously, and our dollars are depreciating...
rapidly in value.  It is not the wealthy or the powerful who are hurt in these circumstances, but the average person in Australia especially retired people, especially people wanting to by their own home. In spite of the increase in the pension by $3, that increase hardly matches the inflation of the last year. Within Australia the Government has created economic chaos. It has created a situation in which no individual can plan his future with any degree of certainty or confidence. Overseas we know that the Government has on almost every possible occasion publicly rebuked or offended important friends and allies, both close to Australia and further afield. This has been part of the process to win new friends in China, in Russia and in Africa. There is no need to abuse traditional allies in the search for new friendships. The Government does not recognise the basic instability and danger caused by the relationships between China, Russia, Japan, Europe and America. In a situation of grave uncertainty the Government is allowing our defence forces and defence capacity to be destroyed rapidly.

This is the record of the Government in major areas that affect all our lives and on top of all of this there came the attempt to gain control of the Senate by a manner that was certainly without precedent, and in my view, quite improper. It was not a democratic process. The accumulation of all of these events has caused the Opposition Parties to come to a decision to try and defeat the Government, to force a general election so that
all Australia can cast a considered judgement whether they want this Government to continue, or whether they want it replaced by a Government led by Bill Snedden that will restore sanity and responsibility, a sense of national purpose and conviction to Australian affairs.
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