Liberal Party Federal Council

During this last week a number of things have been happening. Over the weekend the Liberal Party Federal met to endorse a new Liberal Party platform.

It is imaginative. It looks to the future. There was some vigorous debate over its acceptance, and all of this is healthy.

In my own area I strongly support secret ballots in union elections and that is firm policy for the parliamentary party.

The underlying theme of the whole platform is to emphasise the role of the individual in society and the maintenance of individuals' right of choice.

Education Expenses

One of the more unhappy aspects of the Federal budget was the government's decision to cut education expenses allowable for taxation purposes from $400 to $150.

While Mr Whitlam was overseas Caucus made a decision that they would have that budget item reversed because they realise how much it would harm many people. When Mr Whitlam returned from overseas he said in a press conference that he supported $150 and that $400 was not justifiable. In supporting his view Mr Whitlam said: "I sometimes wonder who my colleagues believe elected a Labour government, who they think a Labour government should have first in mind..."

Mr Whitlam also said that statistics showed that the deduction claimed for students only exceeded $150 a year for those parents whose income was $10,000 or more.

This is just not true. Official income statistics from the Bureau of Statistics indicates that for the last year in which these detailed figures are available, 1967/68, slightly over 124,000 people claimed the maximum allowance. Of these 47.0% had incomes of less than $6,000. That shows very plainly that many people with modest incomes were paying out a good deal for the education of their children.

I doubt very much if they will appreciate Mr Whitlam's attitude and his determination to lay his job on the line over the issue. That was the only way he could compel Caucus to back down. This provision hits many people who send children to private schools and to government schools.
Super-phosphate

While he was acting Prime Minister Dr Cairns said bluntly that the Prime Minister had mishandled the super-phosphate issue. He let some people believe that the government's decision to throw out the bounty should be reviewed, although he drew back from that position after he was criticised by his colleagues.

In case there is any remaining doubts amongst farmers, the Prime Minister re-affirmed his stance that the abolition of the bounty must stand. Farmers certainly know where they are with this government. By June 1975 costs will have doubled over a three year period and the gross income is likely to be half of last year. The Prime Minister seems to be entirely unaware of these circumstances. He still seems to believe farmers have never had it so good.

Mr Whitlam Overseas

Mr Whitlam has just come back from overseas - he is going overseas again for a trip that will last, I think, 52 days. Many of his other ministers have also been overseas with great regularity. I would have thought that under present circumstances the Prime Minister would have regarded his first obligation would be in regard to Australia.

Many people are in difficulty. He is rapidly giving people in Canberra the view that he is wanting to travel the world as Prime Minister before he is dismissed from the job. At the moment there is little doubt that a majority of people would want to do just that.

The Opposition pressed the Prime Minister to give a report of his trip in the parliament. He spoke about his visit to Williamsburg and Niagra Falls in answer to the question. He said how valuable the trip had been to him but he refused to commit himself to making a report to the nation.

I can remember in other times when Prime Ministers or Foreign Ministers returned from overseas, one of their immediate tasks was to report to the nation on what had occurred during their visits overseas. It was always a significant parliamentary event.

The Prime Minister is not vastly concerned, it appears, with letting Australia know what he is doing or in reporting to the parliament.

I had earlier suggested that there were two things of the utmost importance that the Prime Minister should have done in this last trip. Let me explain the background.

Because of the rise in oil prices from which Australia has been insulated so far, the Middle East is drawing off the liquid resources of the western world at the rate of one billion dollars a week. Those reserves total about $170,000,000. Under present circumstances they will be gone in two
and a half years. This is creating an increasing difficulty in financing world trade. The economies of European countries, Japan, America are in great difficulty. If we are not careful we will see recession in many countries coupled with a real down turn in world trade causing worldwide hardship.

In addition to this the same drawing off of reserves to the Middle East is making it much harder to find development capital. I have been told, for example, that there were once 400 banks around the world in which large sums of developmental capital could be safely placed. I am advised that that number has been reduced to about 20.

These two matters could create enormous difficulties throughout the western trading world. Major trading countries should take initiatives in relation to that before a crisis develops and not after it has occurred, leaving wide-spread difficulty in its wake. Mr Whitlam ignored both subjects on his recent visit overseas.

Arbitration Legislation

Mr Cameron, the Minister for Labour, brought in another Bill to change the Arbitration Act in Australia. The subject matter of the Bill is a complicated legal one involving the organisations of unions.

A difficult situation has arisen concerning the legality of a number of unions because they have to be incorporated in both the state and Federal jurisdiction in at least four states. If the proposed Commonwealth legislation is to be effective, significant state legislation would be required in N.S.W., Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia, and unions themselves would have to be willing to participate.

They would in effect have to sign a deed and lodge it with the Industrial Registrar and in that deed they would have to say they would be prepared to pay any fine or penalty imposed on the union as a result of state industrial determinations.

For the Opposition I urged that the legislation ought to be deferred until Mr Cameron had adequately consulted the states, so that we could know whether or not they would play their part and also until Mr Cameron had told us whether or not the trade unions would be prepared to sign the proposed deed.

I doubt very much if some of the prominent and significant unions, like the B.L.F. or the A.M.W.U. would be prepared to do that. Mr Cameron, therefore, ran the risk of introducing legislation that will be abortive because he has not been prepared to have adequate consultation and negotiation with the unions and state governments before pressing ahead.
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