Individualism and Government

A crucial political choice has emerged over the past two years with special clarity.

It is the position of the individual in a bureaucratic and centralised society.

The problem is not unique to Australia, and it is one with which no western country has successfully coped.

In Australia it has been aggravated because, far from recognising any problem of individual freedom and rights, the Government has deliberately set about increasing the power of the central government and the bureaucracy.

At all levels people in Australia are finding that decisions about their lives are being taken in Canberra, where once the decisions were taken at local or State levels.

The nation is now at a major turning point, where we must decide whether to allow centralised bureaucracy to take us over, or whether the rights and the role of the individual should be asserted once more.

We must decide whether we continue at breakneck speed towards a big brother society run by bureaucrats in Canberra, or towards a society where there is a genuine respect for the capacity of people to control their own lives.

The legislation which the Government is pushing through, to set up a government insurance corporation, to control public companies and to regulate the securities industry, to set up an interstate commission over transport, all have one characteristic in common.

They increase the powers of Ministers, public servants, and government commissions, and they accordingly restrict the scope of individuals.

The process of inflation fits in with this process. Public institutions, companies, nursing homes, industries generally, are being forced to seek Government help by rising costs, falling demand and the general economic dislocation.

They find they can get it, often freely, but the price they pay is centralised bureaucratic control from Canberra. They are no longer running their own show. As individuals they are diminished, robbed of part of their independence.
The same thing is happening to the ordinary taxpayer when he works overtime. The Government takes 48 cents of each additional dollar that he earns, and it is Canberra who decides how that money is to be spent.

The cause may be worthy, or it may be an extravagance.

But the fundamental principle that Governments should maximise their control over resources is wrong.

There are obvious, immediate, administrative steps which can be taken to arrest the growth of Government and to restore the role of the individual.

Inflation must be controlled, not only to revive the economy, but also because inflation makes it easy for Governments to grab resources.

There must be a major restructuring of the tax system for the same reason: to prevent Governments from profiting from inflation.

Government expenditure, which is a major cause of inflation, must be cut back, and money returned to the pockets of the taxpayers and to the reserves of private enterprise, so that jobs can be created and so that people can determine their own future.

The Environment

One area where policies and attitudes have been developed very much because of our concern for the individual is that of the environment.

The Opposition Parties are not concerned only with the development of Australia but also to establish the best conditions for people to live in Australia.

It is a cause which led me in 1965 to become a foundation member of the Australian Conservation Foundation.

The preservation of land in its natural state is a responsibility that we in our generation owe to the generations to come.

The Opposition Parties support the establishment of national parks.

Environmental impact statements were introduced by earlier Governments and the system was continued by the present Government. Although it proclaimed its support for the principle, it broke that principle in the case of Fraser Island. The Government approved sand mining on Fraser Island without requiring a Commonwealth Environment Impact Study before the decision was taken.
There is a balance to be struck between the need to conserve and protect the environment and the need to continue Australian development.

To reach that balance requires careful and dispassionate consideration. Extremism on either side is damaging to the causes both of progress and conservation.

Victoria's Land Conservation Council which makes public recommendations to the Minister for Conservation on the use of Victorian State land is an example of a successful approach to environmental problems.

The appointment of the Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Cairns would appear to be an example of a wrong approach.

I believe he will bring unnecessary conflict through his political extremism, into an area which requires reason and commonsense.

The Opposition strongly supports the cause of the environment.

We hope that this appointment does not mean that the environment is to be made a political football.