

Policy Launch Speech: Joseph Cook Opposition Leader (LIB)

Town Hall, Paramatta, 3 April 1913

“I appreciate the privilege of announcing the aims and policy of the Liberal party from the platform where for twelve years past by our kindest and confidence I have been accustomed to announce my personal views. To-night I speak to a much larger audience and with a sense of greater responsibility.

The manifesto of the opposing party has been issued. Its “binding” programme has been before the public for over twelve months. In this respect we are fortunate. We are told in plain black and white, and in the briefest and simplest way, the nature and character of their destructive proposals. With wearisome iteration we have been requested to state our programme. Before doing so permit me a brief glance at theirs.

The fighting platform determined at the Hobart Labor Conference contains quite a number of planks which are put in the shop window for dressing purposes alone. Many of them are already among the laws and institutions of the country. As, for instance, white Australia land tax, navigation laws. Another plank, “The Restriction of Public Borrowing,” is in the light of recent circumstances, the most perfect piece of irony ever indulged in by any body of men anywhere. These eliminated there remain, besides the objective which is declared to “contain everything that a progressive Socialist, could desire, from flying machines to brick making”, two regulative proposals affecting arbitration and insurance, the remainder being a set of nationalising proposals with the political machinery for their realisation. The big central cake in the political window is a socialistic one, surrounded by one or two small confections thrown in to complete the display.

Never have the issues been so narrowed down and focused for the public as on this occasion, and never have issues so important and overmastering been submitted to a British speaking community. Shortly stated, the issue made for us at the Hobart Labor Conference is the converting of our Federal union into a Unitary constitution with a view to the ultimate socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange. There is nothing else in their “fighting platform” Nothing else can be fairly read into it. Socialism the goal-Unification the means to reach it. (Cheers.) We join issue with these destructive and devouring proposals and submit an alternative programme of progressive measures, which will enable this great country to continue to mark forward safely and confidently to the glorious destiny which waits it. (Hear, hear.)

It may at the outset be well to remind ourselves and the country that Liberalism is more than a theory of government or even a programme, or matter how admirable its planks may be. It is a state of mind, an attitude, an outlook which is as wide and comprehensive as the needs of the community. It determines its principles of action, not with references

to the programme of a party, but with regard to the actual fact of life. It is a living, growing, self-perpetuating organism, greater than all machinery; old as the everlasting hills, and yet new enough and vigorous enough and enlightened enough to meet all the need of our 20th century (Cheers.)

It looks upon the nation as the making place for men and is in favour of any law safeguarding the interests of all who labor, developing their energy and spirits, and administering to their happiness and welfare. It has been happily described as “the cult of tolerance and progress”. (Cheers.) It has a glorious history behind it, and we confidently believe a yet more splendid future. The Liberal deviseth liberal measures” ignoring the dazzling displays of the political necromancers who at the moment pass for statesmen in Australia. Setting aside the quack nostrums so freely offered at election time, let us look at a useful working programme, which will add to the sum of Liberal measures we already enjoy and make our Commonwealth minister increasingly to the common weal. I invite your attention to the following proposals of the Liberal party. In the first place our objective is an:-

To keep Australia comparatively empty is its greatest danger, and this appears to be the policy of the present Government. In this supremely important question the Labor party speaks with many voices and shapes its attitude for purely political purposes. (Hear, hear.) While Mr Seddon, for instance is telling the people at Homes that the cry in Western Australia is “Find us the people that we may give them land,” Mr O’Malley is interviewing the unemployed in Melbourne and declaring that the trouble is “the results of the State immigration policy, which is outrageous and cruel”. So again, while Mr Hughes informs the public in Great Britain that the figures relating to immigration in themselves furnish the most complete justification of the Labor Government’s policy, his colleague Mr Roberts says the real idea is not to populate Australia, but to dump surplus labor on our shores with the single object of dragging down the general standards of living with its consequent degradation and misery; and his party here in all the States is clamouring for its cessation.

When again, the Government was pressed by the Opposition to enter upon an active immigration campaign, the Minister for External Affairs replied, that the Ministry was ready to act as soon as requested by the States to do so. At the succeeding State Premiers Conference the request for financial co-operation was made and promptly and decisively refused by the Federal Government, on the ground that “it would not be wise to introduce divided control.” Thus throughout their Administration a double-voice has been heard, and a double part has been placed, with regard to this great question. We are of the opinion that only by a wisely organized scheme which, with the active co-operation fo the States will set a steady and continuous stream of approved immigrants towards these shores, can our future safety be guaranteed and the heavy financial burdens incidental to the effective occupation of this continent be sustained. (Cheers.) I repeat the statement recently made – that we must either people this continent or perish. (Hear, hear.)

Moreover, it is time the problem was regarded not merely as a Federal but an Imperial one. To facilitate migration within the Empire has been happily termed the “promotion of the circulation of its Imperial life blood.” At the present time the Government is circulating literature in Great Britain, telling of millions of acres of land awaiting the advent of white settlers from oversea. If this be so, and few will deny it, the problem is

clearly one of organization, and should be so regarded by both State and Federal Governments. I leave this very important and interesting question with the statement of an incontrovertible fact, namely, that those countries of the world into which immigrants are today pouring are most sound and prosperous and are maintaining the highest "white" standards with the greatest ease and resulting prosperity. (Hear, hear)

At first blush it would seem to be a piece of the sheerest rhetoric to put these items in an Australian Liberal programme. Small consideration, however is required to make it necessity apparent, and its appearance appropriate. Under a new and sinister guise the tyranny of olden times is again rearing its ugly head in our midst. (Hear, hear.) The appointment of partisans to high places and positions finds its counterpart to-day in the selection of candidates for high civil places on account of their political opinions and services and friendship with Ministers and members. The Star Chamber of medieval times has its counterpart to-day in the proceedings of our royal commissions under the new act, which attempts to drag from business people all the secrets and details of their business affairs on pain of detention in custody until they are disclosed. Powers and penalties which hitherto have been charily put into hands of a judge are now claimed and exercised for party purposes by political partisans and nominees of the Government of the day. (Hear, hear.)

We also lately beheld the spectacle of an outside coterie summoning and flagellating Ministers for disobedience of caucus decisions, while Federal members who have submitted have complained on the platforms of the country that they have been required to vote against their consciences three times in one week. With all this blind obedience, heresy hunts and the political "leg-ropes" of the caucus, the Liberal is in irreconcilable conflict. (Cheers.) His duty is first to his country and his constituents and last and least to any junta of men outside who are strenuously endeavouring to establish a tyrannical autocracy in this free land. He is for freedom in his thoughts, his actions, his enterprises, subscribing freely and cordially to the requirements of the law and the wishes of his constituents. Our motto is wisely ordered freedom, and a claim to the rights and privileges, as well as a full recognition of the duties of a free representative of a free people in a free parliament.

Liberals stand also for a Federal as opposed to a Unitary Australia, and therefore square against the Referendum, which for the second time is being submitted to the vote of the Australian people. (Cheers.) Every artifice and subterfuge is being resorted to in the endeavour to succeed. Predatory trusts are pictured as roaming at large, exploiting, the people and robbing the worker. Illusive promises are made which can never be fulfilled. The fear and cupidity of the people are being played upon - lower wages, higher prices and pure poignant and insupportable misery are threatened as the penalty of a negative vote. Notwithstanding these dire prophecies of evil on the last occasion, the people decided for a federal union of Australia with one of the most decisive votes of modern times. (Hear, hear.) What has happened to justify an alteration we are quite unable to perceive? The only justification from their point of view for their re-submission is the direction of the Hobart Labor Conference and their inability to proceed with their schemes of nationalisation. This secret conclave declared that the deliberate determination of the Australian people must be ignored and the proposals pressed upon them until they are accepted.

Meantime we may remember the following facts in favour of a repetition of the vote: it is only twelve years since Federation became operative. Our constitution is declared by constitutional authorities to be one of the best and most balanced in the world. It is true the Prime Minister has declared it to be "The worst in the world". As against this, however, Professor Dicey has written that: "The Commonwealth is in the strictest sense a federal government ... endowed with very wide legislative authority and this it can legislate on many topics which lie beyond the competence of the Congress of the United States, and in some respects which lie beyond the competence of the Parliament of the Canadian Dominion."

Similarly, the Right Hon. James Bryce has said that: "The range of powers granted to the national or Commonwealth Parliament is very wide – wider than that of Congress of the Swiss National Assembly, or even of the Dominion of Canada. Technically regarded, the Constitution is an excellent piece of work – the arrangement is logical. Its language is for the most part clear and precise."

This logical, clear and precise document is sought to be torn into ribbons by the caucus, the autonomy of the States is to be destroyed and almost the whole of the powers now exercised by them, are to be gathered into the slow moving, despotic and distant control of a centralised Government.

And for what is this State suicide suggested? To quote the Government summary of the case for the Referendum, "It is necessary to extend to people's powers" The simple answer to this spacious statement is that the people already possess all the powers asked for and always have possessed them. No transfer or manipulation of any kind can add one cubit to the constitutional stature of the people. If these powers are transferred the same people will possess them, but they will be able to wield them less wisely and efficiently at the longer range and throughout the wider ambit.

We are also told it is the "weakest federation in the world". To prove this contention we are invited to look at the constitutions of South Africa, Canada and Germany. Mr Cook proceeded to maintain that the Labor policy was unsupported by conditions in these countries. He then continued:- We say that our constitutions has been made by our own people to suit our own circumstances. Its general plan is good enough. The people have said so by a thudding majority of 742,000 to 483,000. Reasons for the rejection of those proposals are set out more fully in the booklet which is to be placed in the hands of every voter. We earnestly invite a perusal of the case against them set out in the publication. Meantime we say that our Federal constitution in its general scheme supplied the best method of governing a country like Australia. We should do well also to profit by the teachings of history. These show that beaurocracy and centralization have always resulted in revolution, while just a frequently from disaster. (Cheers.)

We are told these far-reaching amendments are needed to deal with the predatory trusts of commerce. They seem, however, to be needed as much more by the still more predatory political trusts represented by the caucus. To this and every rhetorical trick and all the sophistry of the Government are brought to the task set them by their masters in the Hobart conference. Here is a brief sample. "The trusts rule the world". This would include the control of the three Labor Governments of Australia (Laughter.) "They fix prices". "They send up the cost of living". They have the worker "in a vice". They make

him an “economic slave.” So runs the ghastly and blood-curdling tale. So after this general diatribe, particulars are furnished. “Sugar, coal, shipping all controlled by monopolies”. “In addition there are some thirty others.”

Well, what has been the course of the Federal Government in the last three years? Just this – with a pliant and ample majority to carry out all its wishes, it has not lifted a finger to test the powers they already possess. (Cheers.)

Only one so-called trust has been indicted. But this indictment took place under the act of 1906, which the Government knew to be defective – so defective that it induced Parliament to revise and strengthen it. The new act has never been tried. Why? Was it not a shameful thing to use an old act which they declared to be weak and ineffective? And leave untouched the new and stronger act of 1910? The friends of the trust are surely those who play this sort of confidence trick on their supporters, while they pile on the rhetorical agony as to the enormity and extent of their depredations. (Cheers.)

There is a strong and effective act on the Statute Book to cope with malign combinations. I ask again why has it never been tested. The people will never refuse the needful power to protect themselves. It is singularly unfortunate for the Government that that these sugar, cola, and shipping trust should now be singled out. Two of them have received the highest certificates from prominent members of the party in power. Both have been declared to be necessary and beneficial to the workmen in these industries. Never has such anxious solicitude been displayed for the welfare of a combination as that so touchingly exhibited by the most prominent members of the present Government and party in the case of the Coal Vend. In addition, the High Court has declared it does no wrong to the public, while it is of great benefits to the workers. In all this there has never been a single suggestion of want of power, but merely a want of facts to warrant the exercise of the power. (Hear, hear.)

The sugar monopoly has been investigated by Labor sympathisers, and even they have put it on record that to nationalise the sugar industry would be unprofitable, and unwise. And this for three principal reasons.

1. The State could not run it as efficiently as the present company.
2. The price of sugar would go up, and not down.
3. Disaster and loss might come from the enforced scrapping of the machinery because of its being supplanted by more modern methods.

So far as the Government has proceeded, it has established the following namely:-

1. Our Australian trusts, if trust there be, are not of the same harmful kind as those in America.
2. The power to deal with such as we have already exists in our present constitution, whenever the facts are brought to light.
3. They are shown culpable neglect in taking no single step to deal with trust alleged to be injuring the public, after specially seeking a reinforcement of power to enable them to do so.

If they decline so resolutely to use the undoubted resources they have, where is the sense or wisdom of giving them still further constitutional powers.

Our attitude is simple clear and firm. We hold it imperative that these huge organisations of industry should be subject to public control and regulation (Hear, hear). They must be required to service the public as well as themselves. Where this dual purpose is achieved, they do no damage. The test of the whole question is here. Do they help or hurt, do they benefit or injure the public? This test the Government will not apply. The reason is not far to seek.

Those responsible for these proposals have repeatedly declared that they have no faith in legislative regulation and control. They do not in their hearts believe in the efficiency of anything short of nationalisation, and so they have never attempted to put the 1910 act fairly to the test. Our party says of these combinations:- Watch them; see that reasonable competitions is preserved. If they serve the public there is no reason to disturb them. If they do not, then compel them by law to do so. Safeguard the interest of the consuming public and employees, then leave private enterprise to make its way. The remedies for the trust problem would appear to be greater accountability of those in control for the actions of the corporation. (Hear, hear.) Finally on this matter we should do things, not merely content ourselves with frightening the people by raising bogies for purely electioneering purposes.

Of our proposals for defence little need to be said except to make “assurance doubly sure” that the present schemes both naval and military, are to continue to develop along the lines already laid down by our party. The land defence proposals now in process of evolution were finally decided by Lord Kitchener, who was invited for the purpose by the previous Liberal Government. (Hear, hear.) That same Government had previously provided by law for the compulsory training of the young manhood of Australia. Similarly, the scheme for the fleet unit, now so slowly maturing, was provided for by my own party in collaboration with the Admiralty experts at the Imperial Defence Conference of 1909.

That being so, all that requires to be done is to watch that development with sympathy and scrupulous care, at the same time insuring that the main lines of the schemes are not departed from. This policy intends that these preparations are for the defence of the Empire, as well as that of Australia. Our Scheme is to fit the Australian citizens to defend Australian interest wherever threatened, and a navy which may always be rightly regarded as an Australian unit of the navy of the Empire. (Cheers.) When the Empire is at war, Australia, as part of the Empire, is also at war; and it is no evidence of jingoism to recognise this plain, naked and silent fact. Above all else, we must not leave the Dominions in danger of dismemberment by one swift blow at the centre of the Empire. Along these foundational lines our present defence schemes should proceed, aiming at common standards and common preparations for the defence of the whole. (Hear, hear.)

In addition, I wish to emphasise the necessity for increased encouragement to our rifle clubs. Under the new defence scheme this branch will take an altogether new place, for eventually the rifle clubs will be composed of trainer soldiers, forming an important factor in the reserve strength of our army.

The time is already fully ripe for the development of the principle of insurance against “the chances and changes” of our chequered existence. (Cheers). Let it be at once distinctly understood that it is not intended to interfere in any way with the principle of old age pensions. Statement to the contrary just now coming from both the Labor press and platform are one long tissue of falsehood. Liberals did not oppose the Old Age Pensions Act, but enacted it. (Cheers.) Liberals do, however, consider that the whole principle of insurance should be among the institutional things in our national life. This proposal has been taken as in many other cases, from the Liberal platform by our opponents, and with what result during their term of office, it is instructive to note. Insurance found a place in the fighting platform of the Labor socialist party in 1910.

It remains still to plank - a very wooden one with withal. Not the slightest effort has been made to breathe the breath of life into the dry bones of their insurance proposals. And yet there is no principle fraught with greater possibilities of good to the mass of the people of Australia than a wisely conceived scheme of equal insurance. (Cheers.) The only tangible results of their three years administration was to circulate a bill during the closing days of the last session.

We propose to continue and greatly extend the good work already begun by Liberals along lines suggested by the experience of other countries. We propose to mature as early as possible a comprehensive scheme of national insurance, providing for sickness, accidents, maternity, widowhood and unemployment on a contributory basis emphasising again that it is intended to be supplementary to the present pensions and not in substitution for them (Cheers.)

We have in contemplation a comprehensive scheme for the fostering of our industrial resources and the promotion on a large scale of inland development. (Hear, hear.) It is a fundamental principle of modern Liberalism, to which the party fully subscribed, that all the available resources of the Government should be utilised for the benefit of the people in a reasonable and prudent way. Much, for instance, is necessary to be done of the development of overseas markets for our primary productions. Closer touch should be established between those who sell and those who buy, the producer here and the consumer at home, and there seems no reason why all that is distinctive in our primary products should not be brought to the notice of our overseas customers in a direct and responsible way. (Hear, hear.) At the present time we are told that many of our products on arrival home become lost in the general sum of the world’s products concentrated there. We must make an effort to see that our Australian products are known as such, and purchases as such, by consumers who need them.

Corresponding regard will also be paid to our secondly industries, and in connection therewith efforts should be made to extend our statistical tabulations so as to present at least as approximate view of our industrial operations and the demands and supply of our main requirements. We should aim at the enlargement of our statistics, so as to bring into one great conspectus the social and economic movements of the nation. Already this is done in a broad way, for the world in respect to sugar, wheat and such like products. This principle could be extended to manufactures and other sources of production. Efforts should be made to encourage the principle of voluntary co-operation both in production and distribution. The only limits to beset to the operation of this principle are those arising from the capacity and character of the people.

In this connection mention may appropriately be made to the important question of the tariff. (Hear, hear.) Much heart burning has been caused by this question to the extremists on both sides. It is to be frankly recognised that in our party as in the other party, widely divergent views are held by members on the question of free-trade and protection. Common ground has been sought. That common ground appears in the statement already published. There have been three attempts now at the construction of the tariff. The results is that more and not less anomalies become apparent and action must and should be taken as early as possible with a view to a searching inquiry into the whole hearing of the tariff and its relation to our Australian industries. (Hear, hear.) Our proposal briefly is to leave the policy of the present tariff intact.

In the fierce fighting of the last twelve years the principle of protection has won out. (Hear, hear.) That view must be recognised by all who consider the matter calmly and dispassionately. (Hear, hear.) In the application of that policy divergent views will continue to be held and every effort will be made to preserve these divergent views. One thing particularly I wish to make clear is that infinitely greater questions than the tariff is at issue and in comparison with which the tariff must always take second place. It is no longer merely a question of whether the trade shall be protected or free, but whether trade shall be privately undertaken at all. (Hear, hear.)

Meantime, we propose to deal with the tariff in the same way as in almost every civilised country in the world. It must no longer be the tool of parties. Its proper and reasonable adjustment should be suggested by experts who are absolutely disinterested and with due and proper regard for the interest of all concerned. This need not and will not prevent a prompt rectification of such anomalies as are discovered by the department in its administration.

It is not suggested that there should be the slightest surrender of Parliamentary control over all fiscal matters. (Hear, hear.) No outside boy can, or should, assume responsibility for the policy of the country, and if in the exercise later of that responsibility these conflicting views to which I have alluded appear to be irreconcilable, other methods of settlement must be found, and it appears to me the Referendum suggests itself as a means to this end. Already the Referendum has saved the people of Australia from being plunged into the constitutional chaos; already it has saved the Federal Union of Australia. And I see no reason why, if it becomes necessary it should not save from hopeless division that great body of electors which is now united for the accomplishment of higher and more important purposes. (Hear, hear.)

I should add further that since becoming the responsible leader of the party, I have been inundated with appeals from all sorts of people as to what I propose to do to bring down the cost of living and at the same time intimating that in their opinion the present high cost of living is the direct and sole result of the present tariff. I do not hesitate to say, without discussing the subject fully, that I am hopeful an expert investigation of the tariff may lead to a substantial reduction in the purely revenue duties of the present tariff schedule. (Hear, hear.)

This however, is only one of the phases of this very perplexing and world wide problem. If I were compelled to write a recipe for the reduction of the present high cost of living in Australia over and above the increases coming up to the world, I should do it in a

sentence, namely "The restoration of honest, economical and efficient Government throughout Australia." But however much the increased cost of living in Australia exceeds the cost elsewhere, may fairly be set down to this simple and potent cause. While on the question of tariff we further say that since tariffs are necessary under the present conditions an effort should be made to shape them with a view to the development and consolidation of the Empire's resources (Hear, hear.).

Reverting to the general scheme of the development of our Australian resources the times seems fully ripe for an earnest effort, in co-operation with the States for the better utilisation of the waters of the Murray River for purposes both of irrigation and navigation. (Hear, hear.) This question rightly conceived has an intimate bearing upon, and close relation with the important question of immigration and should enter into the scheme of organisation which is so necessarily if the country is to be settled adequately and promptly. (Hear, hear.) For many years the States concerned have been discussing this question of joint control of the Murray. I am credibly informed that a thorough searching of the facts has brought to light important data which it is confidently hoped will land to an amicable solution of this whole matter, and in this final arrangement the Federal Government may well take a friendly and active interest with the approval and co-operation of the States. (Hear, hear.).

I come now to the important questions of our industrial conditions and the general unrest which is apparent on every side. (Hear, hear.) Of all the promises made by the Labor party in Australia, none has been of much stressed as the necessity for bringing industrial peace. We were told the exact word of his last utterance on the subject in the House- I say without hesitation at all, that unless we can regulate prices and profits, all our laborious efforts to preserve industrial peace by submitting arbitration for strikes must be futile. We ought to recognize it.

The plain fact is that these gentlemen do not believe much in the principle of arbitration, or in any efforts to secure industrial peace. (Hear, hear.) Mr Hughes himself in his "Case for Labor" twelve months ago declared that the legal tribunal were to be palliatives only, and that the removal of the main causes of industrial disputes should be effected of legislative action, "carried gradually to the point of national ownership of the means of production, distributions and exchange."

"There can be no peace" says Mr. Spence and his organ, the "Worker". There will be no peace, say other active members of the party. Warfare must continue until capitalism as a social system is overturned, and until then there can be nothing but war between them". It is impossible to believe that gentlemen with these views can properly administer laws which they regard as at the best palliatives and stepping stones to complete nationalisation.

However this may be, the policy of industrial warfare has received its greatest fillip during the past three years. A reliable authority has stated that on half a dozen of the larger disputes alone during that time there has been a sacrifice of more than £3,000,000 of the wage earners money to say nothing of the contingent loss inflicted on the other wage earners connected with them. This leaves out of account about two hundred and fifty other disturbances which have troubled the land during the period of the Labor-

Socialistic administration. In the language of Scripture. "They came not to bring peace, but a sword".

The result is that today a more bitter spirit of antagonism is abroad than before. Organisations, based on class-conscious lines are steadily developing and declaring trial system. (Hear, hear.) Amid the confusion and turmoil of the moment one imperative duty emerges, namely the observance of the laws of the land, industrial and otherwise, and sympathetic study of the whole industrial question.

As far as one may gather their aims from their statements, the Labor-Socialists proposals would seem to be as follows:- The unification of all industrial power in a central Arbitration Court. This in turn to be independent of the High Court, exercising legislative power, similar to that of Parliament itself, to fix all industrial conditions, and to be presided over by a sympathetic judge so that awards may be given satisfactorily to their party. Concurrently with this to cut down prices and profits with the nationalisation proposal in the background. This latter is the definition of new production contained in Mr. Hughes's letter to the Hobart conference. Their idea is that the court is to be made a lodestone to attract all the Labor Socialists of the country.

As against this we make the proposal indicated in our programmed, our idea being to continue the Federal arbitration power more and more to appellate functions, and to leave the prevention and settlement of Federal disputes and the securing of industrial peace to industrial boards created for the purpose, (Hear, hear.) These wages boards still hold the field as means of securing industrial peace and preserving amicable relations between employers and employees. (Cheers.) There should however be mentioned the special function which will attach to this improved and re-organised court, namely to review and readjust any unfair conditions of employment alleged to exist in a State, and which act detrimentally to the industrial conditions in another State, making competition between them unfair and un-federal. This is the very essence of arbitration in its widest and highest sense. (Hear, Hear.)

But it is not high time that our unions in Australia entered upon a constructive industrial era? Is it not time that both sides began to recognise that more is to be gained by working in co-operation? Of all the proposals in the field at the present time, I see nothing which is more likely to bring peace than the principle of co-operation applied to co-partnership and suchlike schemes, as against the fratricidal and destructive war advocated by our opponents. This principal is bitterly opposed by the Labor Socialist leaders who appear to thrive best when discord is most rife.

The results of co-partnery have been summarised as follows: the removal of antagonism and friction between employers and employees; more efficient work on the part of the worker, because of a deeper personal interest in production. A new and strong incentive to better work would be inculcated and the character of the whole of our business life would be raised and dignified.

Unlike Socialism and arbitration, it cannot be affected by an act of Parliament, but only by the employers and employees acting with and for each other.

The cause of industrial peace cannot be furthered by the wild proposals of the Government whose aim is to place the whole of our industrial destinies in the hands of a

centralised court. At the present time there are over 14,000 manufacturing industries in Australia, employing more than 300,000 persons paying £27,500,000 in wages and having a total output of £133,000,000. These industries range through every zone and climate, over a country nearly as large as Europe itself and any attempt to control the whole of its industrial operation from one centre must inevitably result in complete trial paralysis. Here the Federal principle so enunciated; local disputes to be adjusted in the light of local conditions by local courts, while Federal disputes pass to the jurisdiction of the larger Federal power.

The question of our financial control and administration is one of the most important things in our public life to-day. The way Australian expenditure has leaped up is startling. From a population of a little over 4,500,000, we are gathering this year £65,500,000 for the revenue of the country. In addition we shall spend this year £20,000,000 of loan moneys, altogether about £85,000,000 sterling. There are three Labor Governments in Australia at the present time and during the last three years these three Labor Government have increased their expenditure by 52 per cent, while the four Liberal Government have increased theirs by only 12½ per cent. (Hear, hear.) During the same period the population has increased 8 per cent. Money is tight and clear, and tends to become more so.

The three great spendthrifts today are the three Labor Government, and the Federal Government is the worst of all. We have booming trade and flowing revenues, but we are spending it all for the ordinary purposes of Government, and we shall not live within our income during the present financial year. About £1 per head of £5 per family is being collected from customs duties alone more than three years ago. While the ordinary expenditure of the Federal Government has increased 100 per cent. There have been added to the Federal Government pay roll over 10,000 additional persons. These "high jinks" are still proceeding, and as sure as they proceed so sure must they also end-

Men laugh and riot till the feat is o'er.

Then comes the reckoning, and they laugh no more.

(Laughter). There has been no serious examination in Parliament of the finances of this Government during the past three years. None has been possible in the circumstances. The estimates of department after department have been flushed through without a single opportunity to discuss an item. And may an all-night sitting has resulted as a protest against the rushing through pell mell of these large sums. The whole scheme of financial control must be altered as quickly as possible.

Then again, we are spending nearly £4,000,000 this year on our public works without a single independent inquiry of any kind. We have no public works committee. We have no committee of estimated as is the case else where. We have not even a supply and tender board. Parliament is being ignored in every way. Amid all this financial chaos and confusion arising from divided control and divided responsibility, these things stand out as requiring to be done and done speedily:

1. Restore Parliamentary financial control.
2. Apply business methods to the expenditure of the public moneys.

3. Collect within the year the amount needed for the ordinary purposes of Government within the year.

We propose the immediate appointment of a Supply and Tender board, to deal with the purchases of all materials and supplies which may be required. In addition, some expert body or other must come into existence to investigate and report upon these large public undertakings before the people's money is lavished upon (Hear, hear.)

We are often asked for a single instance of this extravagance. The reply is that the instances are innumerable and range from the establishment of Government laundries in the Northern Territory to the reckless spending of the public moneys in the south, including "the man on the job", the unjustifiable delay and large additional expenditure on the construction of the fleet unit; the establishment of socialistic factories, while delaying the armament establishments, the provision of a maternity grant without the slightest knowledge of where it goes or even if the mother gets it all and the unnecessary, costly and wicked duplication of the Savings Banks. The number of similar instances is legion, and will only be brought to the light of day when later full inquiry and comparison becomes possible. One thing has been made quite clear during the recent years. It is that the advent to power of a Labor Government signals the beginning of what has been properly described as "a veritable saturnalia of extravagance". (Hear, hear.)

Liberalism allies itself against the principle obtaining to-day in Government employment by means of which the citizens of Australia are classified and political opponents declared ineligible for Government employment because of their political creed. (Cheers.) Whatever arrangement may be made outside for the granting of judicial preference, conditioned by the circumstances in which it is given, the enactment of absolute preference by the Government is a completed negation of the principle of equal citizenship. (Hear, hear.).

No citizen is allowed to escape his responsibilities, and no citizen should be debarred from his corresponding privileges. Equal opportunity should surely prevail in Government employment, if anywhere at all. The present system, by which the Government service is being packed with political partisans, should be ended as early as possible. (Hear, hear.) To-day the principle of "spoils to the victors" is in vogue from the office boy to the highest administrative positions in the service.

From whatever point of view of facts of the case are considered, the conclusion seems to be irresistible that our present post office control has broken down completely. Money is being poured into it with a free and lavish hand. There will be a deficit on this year's transactions of a million and a half sterling. The discontent of the employees, who are by no means extravagantly paid, is increasing, while the facilities enjoyed by the public are not greater. (Hear, hear.). We therefore come to the conclusion on that the public interest would be served by placing the post office under the control of a commission or board of management, as recommended in the report of the Postal Service Commission, which would control the post office on purely business lines, the Minister remaining the connecting link between Parliament and the board. (Cheers).

One of the greatest of all our responsibilities to-day is the administration of the Northern Territory. Little has been done there during the term of office of the present Government, except to appoint a large number of highly paid officials, in many cases without respect

to their qualifications for the important duties to be performed. In a territory of over 500,000 square miles there is a total white population of fewer than 2000 and of this number 207 are officials. More than one person in every seven is an official. There is an annual deficiency of over £400 per head of the population, and apparently the end is not yet. Dilatory and experimental administrative methods have been applied to this great task. It has taken the Ministry over two years to appoint a Territorial Commission of Inquiry, which has not yet commenced its labours. There are practically no farmers in the Territory, but there are agricultural experts to teach the farmers who are not yet there. (Laughter).

There are mining experts also, but we find no fresh miners wending their steps thitherwards. Land ordinances invite the land seekers from Europe to come and cultivate the land, to which they can have no title, while the freehold is obtainable in the adjoining States. (Laughter). The two chief requirements are railways, and settlers. The former means energetic administration; the latter requires attractive tenures and conditions of settlement. We should commence by telling the immigrant or indeed any settler already in Australia, that if he goes to the Territory he shall have the right to the absolute ownership of a freehold grant of a generous living area. Meanwhile it is comforting to know that the Minister is building a depot for immigrants and a Government laundry. (Laughter.)

Another matter of great importance to Australia is the carrying out of the mandate of the electors, given at the last election, for the consolidation and administration by the Commonwealth of the debts of Australia. (Hear, hear.) On one question has the Prime Minister been more definite in statements or profuse in promise. The net result of their three years administration is to leave things absolutely as they were. In the lines of the old conflict their course has been to

Promise, pause, prepare, postpone

And end by letting things alone.

With every year's delay the problem becomes more difficult, and the sooner it is undertaken the better it will be for all concerned. (Hear, hear.)

One of the actions which must always go down to the discredit of the present Government is its deliberate attempt to shape for party ends the electoral laws of the country. (Cheers.) In this case, they have undone the work which they previously insisted should be done. None were louder in the demands for the postal vote, than members of the present Ministry. (Hear, hear.). Mr Fisher declared it to be the necessary corollary of the universal franchise. After one experience at one election, and because forsooth, the postal voters cast a Liberal majority, this privilege has been dashed from their hands. Mr Fisher takes credit for peculiar sympathy with the mothers of Australia, so much so that he brings them gifts from the Treasury in their hour of need, but on the other hands, he steals from them the privilege of exercising their franchise. Is the gift a quid pro quo for the deprivation? It would seem so.

Not content with taking the votes in certain circumstance from the mothers of Australia, and thus placing them on a lower level than the criminal class of the country, they proceed to place such restrictions as to make it impossible to properly conduct elections,

or even to adequately canvas and inform the electorate without bringing these agencies within the pale of the law. Altogether the act is full of extraordinary penalties and in terms of imprisonment. Some one has said that it is much easier to get into goal by breaking the electoral law than by thieving or committing burglary. (Cheers.) To restore to invalids the opportunity to vote through the post – (Cheers.) – to strike the shackles off the press of the country- (Cheers) to leave the parties and organisations reasonably free to conduct their electioneering, and to reshape our electoral laws so that they will not only reflect the principles of democracy, but also the wisdom and good sense of the community. (Cheers.)

In addition to this, we propose to remove the redistribution of the electoral divisions, necessary to secure an equal franchise from the control and manipulation of Government and Parliament. The power to manipulate and gerrymander the electorates should not be possible either to Parliament for politicians, and we propose to place the matter in the hands of an impartial and competent commission or judge. (Cheers.)

This question has found a place in nearly every programme throughout the whole history of the Commonwealth Parliament. It is time it took shape. It will open up wide vistas of usefulness, if properly organised and constructed. Many problems require to be solved for the primary producers of Australia, which only a well-equipped Commonwealth bureau can attempt. Rightly conceived there would be no duplications of State effort. There should be close co-operation between the two. Each would help the other and each would do things which the other could not. (Hear, hear.). These are the main features of a programme of political and safe reform. In this constitution we do well to remember that to build is always hard and slow - to tear down is easy and swift. One blast of revolution or war may lay waste the nation, but there is no one supreme constructive stroke which can rear the goodly pile a thousand years scarce serves to build a State, an hour may lay it in the dust.

As a result of sinister features of our social life have been internalised instead of relieved. There is more and not less distrust in the workers mind. Industrial peace was definitely undertaken to be ushered in. Instead, there have been 250 strikes – three within the past month. Fresh industrial laws are made and reshaped only to be broken and ignored. To such an extent in this the case that Ministers of the Crown have had to organise efforts to break the strike and keep our social machinery in motion. The cost of living towers up beyond and above the increase which is common to the world. Money is increasingly dear and difficult to obtain. It is nonetheless being procured and spent freely by the Labor Governments, so that millions of additional interest above the normal rate are being piled upon the backs of the present and future generations. While this is so, the real resources of the nation show no corresponding increase. Our cultivation, despite the land tax, so loudly trumpeted as the harbinger of social amelioration, shows no appreciable increase.

The Liberal party offers this to the nation, together with a progressive programme such as I have outlined. Our ideal is that of a wise devolution and definition of national powers, the States continuing to develop within their present sovereignties their own internal resources. The Federation in its sphere attending to its already ample obligations in matters of defence, territorial development and external affairs. Harmonious co-operation taking the place of the present friction and distrust each implementing the

power of the other to control, to defend and to develop the immense resources of our wonderful continent, making it the homes of millions of free, enlightened and prosperous people., who in turn will preserve the traditions of the race and hand them on to succeeding generations honoured, respected and unimpaired.” (Loud cheers.)

Source: Compiled from The Age April 4, 1913, Page 7 and The Sydney Morning Herald.