

Policy Launch Speech: Frank Tudor, Opposition Leader (ALP)

Town Hall, Richmond 29 March 1917

“Sixteen years ago today the first Federal elections were held. Since then I have always topped the poll. If they do me the honour of opposing me on this occasion – and they say they will – [An Interjector: Let them all come!] (Cheers.) Candidly, I do not mind a fight; it will not be upon my shoulders, but upon yours. (Hear, hear.)

After two or three meetings I shall be more in the other States than in Victoria, until the last week. The strength of the Labor movement has been continuing to grow since the first Federal elections, with only one reverse in 1913. Two and a half years ago, after the double dissolution, and after the war had started, the people of Australia were asked to elect a Parliament, and the electors returned the Australian Labor party with a majority in both Houses. In the Senate we had 31 senators out of the 38. For over two years the Labor Government, with practically no alteration in its composition, held office during a very trying time. Everything that could be done in the way of recruiting, training, equipping and transporting men for active service was done. (Hear, hear.)

The present Prime Minister, Mr Hughes, soon after he took office in October, 1915, was invited to Great Britain, and took part in the councils of the Empire there. After his return to Australia in August last he placed before the Cabinet, and afterwards the party, his proposals for compulsory service abroad. This led to a split in the ranks not only of the members of the Parliamentary Labor party, but the rank and file of the Labor movement outside. Mr. Hughes had stated in July, 1915, when Mr Fisher was Prime Minister, that:- “In no circumstances would I agree to send men out of this country to fight against their will”. (Cries of “Rot” and some cheers.) Conscription is the only point of difference in the policy between the men who have followed Mr Hughes and the men who remained in the Labor movement. The result of the conscription referendum is well known. It was defeated. Since then speeches have been made by many who were prominent in the conscription fight. Some have stated that they would not abide by the result of the referendum. In this connection the most notable speech was probably that of Sir William Irvine – (Groans) – at Dandenong on 24th January last, when he stated:-

Further, he for one, could not support any alliance that had not in the forefront of its policy the determination to again, by as early an appeal to the people as possible, seek authority to use the whole strength of Australia, both in manhood and resources, in the prosecution of the war.

While it was said by many that it would be foolish to again appeal to the people on a subject involving conscription within so short a time since the referendum, he could not accept that opinion.

Letters have appeared in the press from other representative men of that party stating that if the principle was a right one in October the members of the present National party had no right to run away from it. A Minister who took part in the negotiations for the formation of the present Ministry – the Hon. J.A. Jensen, Minister of Trade

and Customs – speaking at Launceston on 12th March, said – Speaking for himself however, he thought that one of the first things that should be done when the present Government returned to office after the election was to ask the people the same question again, and get an overwhelming “Yes” on this occasion. (Cries of No chance!) The Prime Minister, in his speech last Tuesday at Bendigo, said, with regard to conscription – “If, however, national safety demands it, the question will again be referred to the people. That is the policy of the Government on this great question. It is clear and definite.”

The Hughes Government says it has been formed for no other purpose than that of winning the war – (Loud laughter) – yet it has failed to show how it will do more than the Labor party has done for the past two years, unless it has another referendum on conscription. The present Government has absolutely no right to call itself the “Win-the-War” Government – (Hear, hear) – as the Labor party is just as anxious to win the war as any member of the present Government or those who support it. (Loud cheers) It has been said that we have no interest in Australia or the empire.

That is not true. Every effort is being made by the Labor party under the voluntary system to obtain recruits, and its attitude is quite clear on this question. Take our three Senate candidates in New South Wales, Senator Watson has two sons at the front, ex-Senator Rae has three sons there, and Peter Bowling has five sons fighting. (Loud cheers) This does not show that there is any hostility on the part of Labor candidates to voluntary recruiting. (Hear, hear)

At this stage I desire, in passing, to refer to a paragraph in “The Age” this morning, announcing the enlistment of my son. He enlisted on Tuesday night. (Loud cheers). It has however, been suggested that he might have enlisted because we were on the eve of an election – (cries of “Shame!”) – and because I was on the eve of making a policy speech. Now, I want to say this: The lad has been anxious to go for some time. (Loud cheers.) His mother and I told him that as soon as he became eighteen years of age we would give our consent and would sign the necessary papers. (Renewed cheers.) He was eighteen years of age last Tuesday, and he came down on that day and enlisted. (More cheering.) Those of you who know me privately will know that he is the only son it is likely I shall have who will be able to take his place in the firing line, my only other son is, unfortunately, crippled. It will thus be seen that there is absolutely no truth in the charge which the other side is making. (Loud cheers.)

Although the present Government and the Government which preceded it, and the parties which they represent, professed to be in favor of the voluntary system since last October, not very many of their members have appeared on the recruiting platform in connection with it, and they do not seem very enthusiastic regarding the voluntary movement, but are apparently hoping that it will not be successful so that they can have an excuse for having another referendum on the question. For the four months before the referendum ending October last year, when the Government said it was impossible to get the men, we raised 39,925 men by voluntary enlistment, but for the subsequent four months to the end of February, there have been 17,192 enlistments.

Now I have been asked to make an appeal for recruits. I consider that the necessity for recruits is great, and those who are eligible should consider as to whether their duty is not to take their places in the ranks. I stated that distinctly on every platform during the conscription campaign. (Hear, hear.) I make this appeal in the middle of

my speech doing what I believe no other candidate has done. (Hear, hear.)
Recruiting sergeants and doctors will be in attendance after the meeting and I ask you to do your best. (Hear, hear.)

Our duty to the men who are returning and who will return, must not be neglected. Provision has been made for pensions for the widows of men who have been killed – (A Voice, ironically; Half-a-crown a week) – and also for the men who have returned and are incapacitated from work. A greater effort should be made in the in the direction of finding employment for those who can be employed, and for making the lot easier for those who are unemployable. Those previously in business should be assisted to start business again. Land should also be made available for those who desire to start in that direction, and this should be under the direct control of a responsible Minister. Where in Australia millions of acres of land are available for cultivation, the Government should purchase it, and if necessary, train the men to make cultivation a success. (Cheers.)

In 1911 – long before the war broke out – the Labor Government commenced operations for the manufacturing of small arms at Lithgow, N.S.W.: a cordite factory was established at Maribyrnong, Vic, a clothing factory at South Melbourne, and a saddlery and harness factory at Clifton Hill. Since that time the woolen mills at Geelong have commenced operations, and provide cloth not only for the cadets and citizen forces in Australia, but also for the Australian soldiers fighting abroad. It must not be forgotten that it was the Labor party that prepared for the time when Australia might be at war, and since the present struggle started these factories have saved the Government large sums of money, and have turned out a superior article to that usually supplied by contractors.

It is apparently difficult today to find anyone who is not in favor of providing some protection for Australian industries – (Hear, hear) – but it is more difficult to find persons who will express themselves definitely upon this subject. In December, 1914, the present tariff was introduced by myself. It was never considered by Parliament, although the tariff was laid upon the table of Parliament before the InterState Commission presented many of its reports. The import duties are, in the majority of cases, higher than those suggested by that commission. No one regrets more than I do that Parliament was not given an opportunity to discuss that tariff and alter or amend it in any way that Parliament desired.

I did try, when the Validating Bill was brought on recently to move some amendments but was defeated, every Ministerialist voting against every alteration. One way to provide for the men who return will be to have ready the industries of Australia – (Hear, hear) – and we must not wait until all the men are here before any alteration is made in our tariff. (Hear, hear) As it is necessary in time of peace to prepare for war, so it is vitally necessary at the present time to prepare for the men who are here now and those who will return, and to make Australia more independent of the outside world than she has ever previously been, and to find employment for our artisans. We have the raw material in Australia, and should therefore see as far as possible that the raw material is worked up for our own people, and not sent oversea to be brought back again as manufactured articles. (Cheers.)

It may be said that the decisions which were arrived at by the Paris Conference will prevent us from dealing with the tariff; but as Parliament has never had an opportunity of discussing those resolutions I think we should deal with this matter as early as possible, and so be prepared for the difficult times ahead of us when we shall

need to find employment not only for the soldiers who will return, but also for the Australians who are here, and who were unable to take part in the war. The necessity for this is becoming more marked every day, particularly owing to the increase of freights increasing the prices of many commodities which should be made in Australia. Special attention should be given to those trades where we will use our own raw material, such as the iron industry, timber, textiles and leather trades, foodstuffs and other industries, where the conditions of employment in competing countries are detrimental to the Australian industries. (Cheers.) For the above reasons the Labor party considers that there should be an immediate revision of the tariff. (Loud cheers)

As far as our Federal powers will admit, we propose to make the lot of the man on the land more attractive. Neither by unjust taxation nor lack of postal, telegraphic and other facilities shall we embitter his life. We regard centralization as a great evil, and we shall by all means in our power, including measures for the conservation of water, irrigation and rural credits, endeavour to improve the prospects of the people who live in the country. We shall appoint producers' representatives on all Government boards dealing with the handling and marketing of primary products.

The importance of our primary industries is realised today by the huge production and export of wheat, butter and meat from Australia at the present time. Unfortunately the high freights that are prevailing in shipping circles have not enabled the farmer to obtain advantage of these high prices for his products which he sends oversea. The wheat [word unclear] which was inaugurated by the Labor Government has enabled the farmer to obtain better prices than he would have obtained through private enterprise. When the pool started by the Labor Government it was [*discounted?*] by the supporters of the present Government. Prompt payment should be made by the pool to the farmers so as to allow them to get the value of their wheat without delay. (Hear, hear) While in charge of the Customs department I always kept in view the principle that the people of Australia were entitled to goods at the same price at which they were placed on board the ship for export. (Cheers.) In other words I was opposed to the dumping of goods purchased in Australia to places outside Australia at a cheaper price than that at which they were sold in the country in which they were produced. (Hear, hear) We are also opposed to the dumping of manufactured goods into Australia to ruin our industries here. (Loud cheers)

It is recognized by everyone that huge war profits have been made in certain industries during the progress of the war, and, as stated in the manifesto of the Labor party, it is intended if we are returned to power, to tax war-time profits on the basis of 50 per cent of excess profits for the year ending 30th June 1915; 60 per cent, for the year ending 30th June, 1916; and 100 per cent thereafter while the war lasts. (Loud cheers) The bill will provide for a reasonable return on capital invested, and a board of referees will be appointed to deal with Australian companies operating outside Australia, new businesses, and any local cases that might entail injustices or hardship. This should have been dealt with long ago. (Hear, hear) The Ministerial policy on this question is not definite, no percentage of tax being mentioned, and the Prime Minister did not even say the Government would follow the British act. [A Voice: Irvine would not let him.] (Laughter and cheers.)

Over a year ago the Labor Government established the policy of price fixing, and fixed the price of several commodities. This was strongly objected to in Parliament by the supporters of the present Government, and was also fought in the law courts.

Pending an amendment to grant this power we are in favor of a continuation and extension of that policy so as to prevent the producers and consumers being left to the mercy of the agents or middlemen. (Hear, hear)

The policy of the Australian Labor party is that, as far as may be possible, Commonwealth and State loans should be raised in Australia. Interest will to this extent be paid within the Commonwealth and not abroad. Prior to the war few persons would have believed it possible to borrow within one year £58,000,000 at 4 1½ per cent, per annum. As Australians become better informed of the natural resources of their mighty continent they will invest still larger sums in their own national securities, making it less necessary to seek financial assistance outside their own borders. It will be remembered that in 1911 the Fisher Labor Ministry submitted to the people a referendum for the purpose of giving to the Federal Parliament an extension of powers under the constitution. This was defeated.

A referendum on the same question was again taken in 1913, and although we then polled a much larger vote for the alteration of the constitution the proposals were again defeated. If returned to power we propose to resubmit the Referendum proposals to the people of Australia – (Loud cheers) – because we believe that every word said by the Prime Minister in 1915, in his case for the Referendum is as true today as it (Renewed cheers.) Power will also be asked for amendments of the constitution to provide for the payment of pensions to widows and orphans, and to embody in the constitution the principle of universal suffrage. It is quite possible that the principle of universal suffrage, which we enjoy today, could be altered, and it might be altered by those who are opposed to the Labor party. (Hear, hear) For that reason we propose to have an amendment and to put it into the constitution, so that only the people themselves could take away their right to vote. (Cheers.)

The Labor party is not, and never has been, opposed to the representation of Australia at the Imperial Conference, but considers that decisions affecting the Commonwealth should be submitted to the Federal Parliament for ratification, and the delegates going should be instructed to oppose any curtailment of the powers of self-government that are now enjoyed by the people of Australia. (Loud cheers) The proposed representatives, the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes), Sir William Irvine and Sir John Forrest, who were going, certainly did not represent Australian opinions on many matters. These three gentlemen were strongly in favor of conscription, and yet this question was defeated on 28th October. Surely, then, it must be admitted that they were not true representatives of the Commonwealth. The delegate or delegate or delegates who go should represent the views of the majority of the people. (Cheers.)

The Labor movement today is no different from what it was, except that some members have left the party. [A Female Voice: They did not leave; they were kicked out.] (Cheers.)

This is not the first time in the history of our movement that this has happened. One of the stock arguments of our opponents today is that we are dictated to from outside bodies and are responsible to them for our actions. That statement is not true. During the sixteen years that I have been in the Federal Parliament I have never been dictated to as to how I shall vote upon any particular measure that was brought before Parliament.

The men in the Parliamentary Labor party today are in exactly the same position as those who have been in since the present Labor party was brought into existence.

Today the men who were in the Labor movement criticize the outside organizations and the executive committees of those organizations, and state that they are “juntas” but when they take part with other self-elected persons in any gathering to select candidate they call it a “conference”. (Hear, hear)

During the referendum campaign and also at the recent State elections in New South Wales, the bogey that was most serviceable to our opponents was the I.W.W. bogey.

[A Voice: What rot.] But it must not be forgotten that an act was passed by the Federal Parliament about four months ago to deal with members of unlawful associations, and great powers were given to the Government under that act, but as far as I know not one single person has been dealt with under that act. That bogey should not be serviceable any longer. (Cheers.) It was brought forward by the Government as an electioneering dodge to try and trap the Labor party, but we gave them their bill.

During the referendum campaign the Labor party was called pro-Germans, shirkers, disloyalists, and members of the I.W.W. and accused of having received German gold. Yet three months afterwards the same Labor party was invited to come and join the National Government. (Loud laughter) Either the men who made the charges did not believe them, or else they had no right to ask us to join in the Government of this country. (Cheers.) The Prime Minister at Bendigo said that the men who denounced the presence of Mr. Cook and his followers in the Government had approached Mr. Cook quietly, and given him positive assurance that they would support him and his Government. That statement is not true. (Hear, hear) The day after the Prime Minister left the Labor party I was elected as its leader, and I never approached Mr Cook or anybody else to displace the Hughes Government. If anyone approached Mr Cook, either privately or openly, it was without any authority from our party.

The resignation of a senator will be well remembered. Senator Ready, who was an official of the Labor party, was reported to be ill at the House, and the next day his resignation was sent in, and he only informed the Labor leader in the Senate that he had sent his resignation after it has been forwarded to the President, and it was done without even consulting or informing any member of the Labor party. I moved in the House for a royal commission to inquire into this matter – (Hear, hear) – and the Prime Minister in his reply to me stated:-

If honorable members require a royal commission, or any other inquiry into the matter, in God’s name let them have it. And added later:- If honorable members opposite say they want an election, and they mean what they say, then, by God, they can have it. (Loud laughter) A division was afterwards taken, and the whole of the Labor party and only one Liberal member voted in favor of a royal commission to inquire into the matter. The resolution was defeated, and the Government declined to take any action to have an inquiry, although the Prime Minister had made the statement quoted. Although the Senate has carried a resolution asking for an inquiry, to such inquiry has been held, and I understand that the Government declines to do anything further in the matter. (Shame.) I have no intention of dealing with the other charges when were made by Senator Watson, as I understand that case is before the court in Victoria at the present time. I do say, however, that inquiries should have been made into the circumstances surrounding the resignation of Senator Ready. (Cheers.)

The names of the candidates will not appear on the ballot papers when will be used by the soldiers overseas, but “Ministerialists” and “Oppositionists” will be shown. We tried very hard to have the names places on the ballot papers, but were defeated.

I hope that everybody with relations or friends at the front, or at [word unclear], will write to them advising that the “Oppositionists” at the forthcoming elections are the Australian Labor party. It must not be forgotten that the Hughes-Coot fusion has placed the Liberal party in power once more, as about two-thirds of the members of the present party are members of the Deakin-Cook fusion, and they will be able to dictate the policy of this country. The people of Australia must not forget that the members who are returned to the HR will be there for three years, to deal not only with war matters, but with every subject of legislation which might be submitted to the Commonwealth Parliament during that time; and the senators will be elected for six years. Care must therefore be exercised in the recording of votes for the two parties. It remains for you to say whether you will have what has been aptly termed the triple fusion – the wreckage of the Deakin party, the wreckage of the Cook party, and the wreckage of the Hughes party – (Loud cheers) – returned to power in the country, or whether you will remain true and vote solidly for the Australian (Loud and prolonged cheers.) [The following question was then sent up to the platform:- “Will Mr Tudor, if elected, agree to bring a preferential system of voting into existence?”.]

I have no objection to the preferential system of voting, but I always notice that these questions are brought out at election times by the people who are opposed to us, and they are used as a rule for the purpose of trying to divide the Labor forces. When an electoral act is before Parliament I personally would advocate the preferential system, but I do not think it is nearly as vital as some people want to make out. [An Elector: Will you bring it in?] (Hear, hear) I cannot bring it in. I am only one man in 75. It would be a question for the party. I have given you my opinion.”

Source: Compiled from The Age 30 March 1917, Page 7 and The Sydney Morning Herald.