

Policy Launch Speech: Harold Holt, Prime Minister (LP)

8 November 1966

“Between now and polling day, our Australian democracy will be involved in a great debate about many aspects of policy. You will be taking part in a national stock-taking. The policies you support with your vote will bear directly on your well-being and the welfare of the nation.

These will be critical years for Australia, but they hold great promise for our advancement. They should be years of steady national progress – progress, fortifying our security, and strengthening the base of our economy.

As you view this forward prospect, you find Australia well poised for progress. You must feel is in your bones, as I do, that the next decade may rank as the greatest in our history.

The Government I lead is, as you know, a coalition between members of the Liberal Party and of the Country Party. We have worked well and happily together as a team. That unity and teamwork will continue. It stands in contrast to the disunity and disarray of the Australian Labor Party which presents itself as the alternative government. It is indeed the only alternative government within your choice.

You will be making this choice at a time when our country is moving swiftly into a new and historic era. You have only to look at the map to realise this. The new Parliament will face a challenging period, calling for what is best in the Australian character. But it can be, we believe, an era of great opportunity, and we are growing not only in strength but in maturity. How we are to carry forward the development of this continent and how best we can make the nation secure, forms the very core of this election campaign.

In asking you to return my Government, we are also asking you to confirm principles and policies we believe are right for Australia at this point of our history. They bear on our national integrity and self respect, our obligations to friends and allies, our standing in the free world and the tempo and character of our own growth and development.

All that we plan and hope for Australia must not be put at risk – so far as we Australians can order events by what occurs outside Australia; and we have much to hold fast to and build upon inside our country.

We are building for tomorrow on strong and stable foundations. We have squeezed into 17 years what some countries have taken 150 years to do; what some countries have never achieved.

We Australians regard our personal freedom, liberty and opportunities for enterprise as essential to our way of life. Yet these things are under constant challenge, chiefly by those, whether home or abroad, who believe in an all-powerful State. Our political creed places the highest value upon human personality, to encourage it, not to suppress, to strengthen it, not to weaken.

The socialist basis of the Labor Party is reactionary, its doctrines are musty and its vision blurred by lingering bitterness from battles of the past. In recent years, the ALP has become divided into embittered factions. The Labor Party is not only out of time, but out of tune with the nation's thinking. In its present disorder, it plainly can't give effective leadership or competent government.

You have only to look at the Labor Party's response to one of the most critical challenges of our time. It refuses to acknowledge, or it runs away from, the great central fact of modern history – the tremendous power conflict between the Communist world and the free world.

The foreign policy of every country is affected incessantly by this conflict. It has been the cause of personal tragedy, much blood-shed, much waste and much destruction. It has brought tyranny to some countries and the fear of oppression to others. Yet the Labor Party dismisses all this as a bogey. What a delusion!

On the other hand there is the desire of free people to win for themselves a better way of life. On the other, the design of the Communists to force their way of life on others. During this campaign our political opponents will try to confuse or turn your minds from the central questions which the very history of our time has raised. We are no longer a small, insular, protected country sheltered from the storms and stresses of the world.

We are not a large power, but we do take pride in being a nation, and prided in what we have done to build it and hold it. But that recognition of achievement carries with it responsibilities. It is our belief that the Australian people are equal to those responsibilities.

Later I shall have more to say about what is happening in South-east Asia and South Vietnam, but the support we and others are giving in South Vietnam is not only helping the people of South Vietnam to resist Communist subversions and aggression.

It is providing a shield behind which a new Asia can emerge and grow stronger. The presence of ourselves and other friendly forces there is not a commitment to war; it is a commitment to peace and freedom. But it must be such that the Communists will learn that free Asia, and the friends and allies of free Asia, will not lose heart, will not be worn down, but have strength and staying power – to defend the right of every people to choose their own social and economic order. Together we shall be helping to give the people in these countries the food, the skills, the education and the strength to lead their nations to a better way of life.

That is the kind of involvement we look to with Asia. We all want peace and a peaceful solution of problems and conflicts. We can even be on friendly terms with countries that have fundamentally different ideologies to our own, so long as they don't try to impose their ideas on us by force, by subversion or any other means.

These are matters of great significance which I shall develop later. But I move now from this broad introduction of the issue of the campaign to some of the domestic proposals we have in mind for the next three years.

The economy, despite one of the most severe droughts in our history, is in good shape. It has continued to expand. So has our trade.

Our own efforts and savings, aided by a continuing flow of capital investment from overseas, are enabling us to maintain full employment with a growing population.

We have one of the highest standards of living in the world. We have continuing policies, many of which require increasing annual expenditures. But, in addition to these, we have a number of new proposals which I will outline. First I mention education.

This is important to every Australian and vital to the nation. Our record in this field is proof of our sincerity.

Education is the responsibility of a number of authorities. Each has its role to play. For our part, we have assisted in meeting the needs of the universities; the establishment of advanced colleges of education; we have helped technical education. We instituted grants for school science blocks.

To assist parents and students we have greatly enlarged the Commonwealth scholarship scheme for university education.

With the establishment of colleges of advanced education we have provided a similar scholarship system for them. Commonwealth scholarships are also available for the final two years of secondary education and for technical education.

We have given special taxation allowances to parents for education expenses. We now propose further assistance to education. We will provide \$8 million a year over the next three financial years for the construction and equipment of new colleges for teacher training throughout Australia.

This money will require no matching grants from the States. It will be used by us to build colleges on sites selected by the States, on condition that the State does not reduce its expenditure on teacher training and on condition that at least 10 per cent of the places at the new colleges are reserved for teachers not bonded by the State Education Departments.

Winners of advanced education scholarships will be able to apply those scholarships to a teacher training course in any training college to which they are admitted. These scholarships carry the same benefits as university scholarships and will be available to unbonded students.

Our scheme to provide science laboratories and equipment to all schools has been highly successful. We intend to do more. In the next financial year and subsequently, we will double the amount available to independent schools for these laboratories.

We believe this will ensure that in four years every science teaching secondary school in Australia, whether Government or independent, will have the science teaching laboratories and equipment it needs – provided with the financial help of the Commonwealth Government.

We believe the time has come to establish a Commonwealth Ministry of Education and Science, and we will do this.

This Ministry will be responsible not only for education, but also for certain areas of scientific activity. CSIRO will function within the new Ministry.

I turn to social services. All through the life of the Government we have carried out our policy of giving to the needy the assistance we can afford as a government and nation with many other obligations. It has been our practice to review all aspects of our health and social service policies each year when we consider the Budget.

We have liberalised the means test progressively. We now propose further liberalisation. I shall elaborate on this in a supplementary statement. We will enlarge our social service programme on four fronts:

We will raise by \$156 the limits both of property and income within which pensions will be payable to the aged, the invalid and to widows.

We will expand the scope of the Aged Persons Homes Act, particularly in regard to housing the needy, by making local governing bodies eligible for our subsidy.

We will further assist the disabled in the community by capital assistance on a \$2 for \$1 basis to sheltered workshops and by a special allowance to disabled persons employed in those workshops.

We will make annual grants to certain national voluntary agencies working in the field of social welfare.

Australians want to own their own homes. This is an ambition we have fostered. No country can point to a higher percentage of home ownership. More than half the homes in Australia today have been constructed since we came to office in 1949. In the last Parliament we introduced the Home Savings Grant Scheme, which has already benefited 64,000 young couples. We also introduced the Housing Loans Insurance Corporation.

We will now give the Minister for Housing new discretionary powers designed to meet cases of hardship under the Home Savings Grant Scheme. The discretionary powers will date back to the start of the scheme. Details of these are set out in a supplementary statement.

Further, we will extend the scheme to benefit widowed persons aged less than 36 years who have one or more dependent children. The limitation on the value of the home, including land, will be raised from \$14,000 to \$15,000.

Since 1949 we have consistently carried out our policy of national development. For us this is a wide and embracing term. It means people as well as physical resources. One aspect of national development is vivid in our minds from the recent drought. This is the conservation of that precious commodity – water.

We believe a programme of water conservation related to national needs should now be drawn up by us with State Governments. We have in mind a national water resources development programme. Its purpose would be to increase water conservation activity, to reduce hazards of drought and expand primary production.

We envisage that the States will maintain at least their existing levels of expenditure in this field, from their own financial resources. We shall invite the States to put forward programmes of additional works they would propose for Commonwealth financing. We, in turn, will make a contribution to enable additional works, selected on their merits, to be carried out.

One cannot, at this stage, be precise about the capital requirements of our programme. We contemplate, however, that the contribution to be made by the Commonwealth for selected additional works could amount to \$50 million over the next five years.

A soundly – based research effort is essential to this important industry's prosperity. So is an energetic, imaginative and well-directed promotion campaign. The Government is prepared to increase the scale of its contributions for wool research and promotion when the present arrangements expire next June. For the ensuing three

years the Government would provide funds on a dollar for dollar basis subject to a maximum annual contribution of \$14 million for a programme agreed upon by it and the wool industry.

The present five year plan finished on June 30, 1967, and my Government would consult with industry bodies on the details of a further five year plan. We would discuss with the industry the level of the annual subsidy allocation the Commonwealth's underwriting of the equalisation arrangement for butter and cheese and plans for diversifying markets abroad. The nitrogenous fertiliser subsidy introduced in August will be of particular help to this industry.

The 1966 season's production was affected by drought and abnormally low export prices. We have bolstered the return by loaning the industry \$15 million on concessional terms.

The Commonwealth Queensland Sugar Agreement is due to expire on August 1, 1967. We have assured the Queensland Government we will consult fully with them and ascertain industry views on all matters associated with the industry's position before renewing it. This agreement has provided valuable protection for the industry.

We are persisting vigorously with our efforts to negotiate an international sugar agreement. Our aim is to ensure our producers receive remunerative prices for satisfactory export quantities.

My Government has a programme which assists rural industries considerably in research and extension. Some \$80 million has been made available through joint industry – Commonwealth schemes for research by State and Commonwealth Departments, universities and the CSIRO. The results must be passed on to the farmer. For this improved agricultural extension services are necessary.

We have now embarked on a five-year programme. Under this the Commonwealth's contribution to extension services will be increased by \$4 million above the present level of \$1.4 million.

At the appropriate time, my Government will go into discussions with the wheat, cotton and dried vine fruits industries for the renegotiation of stabilisation schemes having the objective of sustaining in respect of each a stable industry. The development of the North. Commonwealth State and local governments, private individuals and companies are all involved in the whole pattern of northern development.

Apart from our own explorations, we have encouraged private enterprise to undertake wide-ranging exploration of the resources of our north. Mineral and oil discoveries have resulted.

Development has followed actively. New railways and ports, and vast new processing plants are being built. Currently, capital projects totalling more than \$2,000 million are in train. These works are giving new employment and creating new communities.

Our great new resources – some still being discovered – must be effectively utilised. It is desirable that there should be an Australian participation in the ownership and control of those resources along with the industries growing out of them.

There are instances in which more capital is needed to exploit these opportunities than existing Australian companies can marshal. New arrangements and facilities for the provision of capital have to be devised.

This is not an easy matter, but the Government has been working actively and earnestly upon it, as have people and institutions in the world of finance. We are confident we shall find practical means of meeting this objective.

Since 1961 we have provided almost \$30 million to the Queensland and Western Australian Governments for construction of beef roads. This has been money well spent. It has contributed to the development of the beef industry in Northern Australia and to our export earnings from beef. We know the industry is capable of further substantial expansion and that prospects for beef exports are bright. But a still further improved road system is essential for any major expansion. This would mote the development of our northern areas generally.

Current arrangements for the financing of beef roads end in June, 1967. We will discuss with the Governments of Queensland and Western Australia a \$50 million programme of beef roads extending over a period of seven years. This would represent an even greater contribution to this work than in the past.

We are doing more also in the Northern Territory. The new programme there, extending over five or six years, will begin early in 1967- 68.

We see an expanding future for the tourist industry. Our annual grants to the Australian national Travel Association have been increasing substantially and, in 1966-67, were \$862,000. Increasing activity and expenditure providing growing exchange earnings for us require the establishment of an Australian Tourist Commission set up as a statutory body.

We believe this would have the support of ANTA, the tourist industry generally, and the State Governments all of whom have a direct interest in this matter.

What I have outlined by no means represents the limit of our activities in the domestic field over the next three years, but it gives you the trend of our thinking. This brings me back to what I described earlier as the very core of this election.

Our domestic programme depends on its fulfilment of the security of the nation. But the principles and objectives of our foreign policy are at issue in this election. Our Labor opponents attack our assessment of Australia's external security. Domestic affairs cannot be separate from foreign affairs.

Our foreign policy is based on the beliefs we have – and the plans we have – about the kind of Australia all of us want to see and about the kind of society we want to build and preserve here. The security of those things we think are good in Australia depends on the security of a kind of world that also values what is precious both to the individual and the good society. So we have joined with others in paying a price for the freedoms we hope to retain.

Unless there is security for all small nations there cannot be security for any small nation. Unless principles of international conduct are preserved in all international situations they are not likely to be preserved in any. That is the essence of our foreign policy.

We have always seen Australia's security in terms of world security. To that end we have for long allied ourselves with Britain and the United States. The basic principles and objectives of their policies are, for the most part, shared by us. We have sought, above all things, to keep our country at peace; but to have some assurance that Australia will have strong and reliable friends.

That is why we have played our part in the making of the SEATO and ANZUS Treaties which carry with the responsibilities as well as benefits.

Because of those responsibilities, Australian soldiers are fighting in South Vietnam. We know and share the genuine concerns of responsible Australians about what has been happening there. But we believe our decisions have been right. We seek a peaceful settlement of the conflict through negotiation. But think of the consequences of abandoning our objectives – and the people of South Vietnam. South Vietnam would become a Communist state, and the lives and security of millions who have resisted Communism would be in jeopardy.

The impact of our complete withdrawal, as proposed by the Labor Party, would be felt throughout South-east Asia. We too, would come under threat.

We have a vital interest in the effective presence and participation of the United States as a major power in Asia and the Pacific. We have obligations arising from our treaty relationships, from our role as an ally, and from the fact that our own international interests are directly involved in preserving South-east Asia from aggression and from Communist domination.

It has been said that our policies in Vietnam have damaged Australia's standing in Asia. This is absurd. Most Asian countries share our belief that Communist aggression – indeed, aggression of any kind – must be resisted. Our close associations with the free countries of Asia have undoubtedly been strengthened.

I turn now to defence generally. The centre of this problem, in global perspective, is in Asia and hence in our own part of the world.

We must meet large expenditures for forces adequate to our obligations thoroughly trained and equipped with the best and most modern conventional armaments. To finance defence on the scale required and with the necessary personnel increases in all services, our defence expenditure has already more than doubled over the past four years.

We live in an unstable region. We see it as a basic responsibility of the Government of a free people to be prepared for any eventuality.

One of the basic issues of this election is national military training carrying the duty to serve abroad as well as at home. If we are to meet our obligations, we must have trained men immediately available to do the job. Our Army is to be built from Voluntary enlistment did 22,750 as quickly as practicable.

Not provide suitable men to the extent needed. We and our advisers concluded there was no realistic alternative to national service. The call-up has been devised so as to cause the smallest possible disturbance to studies, employment and family commitments, and so as to ensure thorough and effective training before a national serviceman is required to serve overseas. The policy permits young men to make a choice between service with the regular forces and service with the citizen forces.

Withdrawal of national servicemen from Vietnam as intended by the Labor Party would render our task force ineffective and seriously disrupt the Army. It would inevitably mean loss of confidence in Australia by its allies.

Machines and money alone do not make a defence establishment. Our concept of a highly trained mobile striking force has been made effective by the individualism, the intelligence, and cool gallantry of the men who wear Australia's uniform.

National servicemen serving Australia abroad today are as one with their Regular Army comrades in efficiency, purpose and courage.

I have given a broad picture of our thinking on large questions of policy. My supplementary statement issued tonight will give more information on these and other aspects of policy. From experience you can have confidence that we shall be doing all this and a good deal more. You have seen us give prompt effect in the past to our election undertakings. We have also taken further progressive and useful action to meet changing conditions and new developments. I now draw all this together against the political background.

The Liberal Party, in association with the Country Party, has had the longest period of unbroken Federal rule in Australian history. Our Government has remained vigorous and forward looking, assisted by fresh talent from the ranks of our private member.

The Deputy Prime Minister and myself are the only two members remaining from the Ministry formed when we were returned to office in 1949. Today we are clearly more in tune with the aspirations and outlook of Australians than our opponents. For the greater period of our long term of office, the Australian Labor Party has been ravaged by bitter faction fights.

No-where has this internal conflict been fiercer nor more destructive than in the critical field of external security. Even our American allies, so important for our security have been made a target for the spleen of the extremists in the Labor Party. Surely we Australians recognise who are our true friends.

The Labor Party, plagued for so long by the virus of doctrinaire socialism, left-wing influence and class bitterness, seems to have its will too paralysed to think clearly on great issues that affect our safety. The business of government and the conduct of our internal and international affairs are not for men who cannot be of one mind, sometimes for a week on end. Our national affairs are not merchandise for backroom bargaining between leaders of factions.

Many times in recent years, the people of Australia have had a sharp reminder that a Federal Labor Government would not be responsible to the people, or even to its own judgement, but that it would be bound hand and foot by the decisions of 36 people from the ALP, not for the most part, elected by the people of Australia and in no sense responsible to them. This country deserves better than that. A party that cannot lead itself has no claim to lead a nation. Your choice should be clear.

On the great questions of national security, my Government is completely single-minded and united. Our opponents are confused and divided. We believe our national policies look to Australia's future and the national thinking of our opponents is still bogged down in the past. We offer the country strength, unity and purpose as opposed to disunity and confusion. We offer you a programme in domestic affairs which advances national development, national security and social justice.

The choice for you is, we believe, clear-cut. My colleagues and I have enough faith in the common sense and maturity of the Australian people to be confident about your answer".

Source: Compiled from The Canberra Times, 9 November 1966, page 15 and The Sydney Morning Herald.