

Policy Launch Speech: Arthur Calwell, Opposition Leader (ALP)

Royale Ballroom, 6 November 1963

“The dissolution of the 24th Parliament of the Commonwealth was brought about one year ahead of time for reasons other than the false and spurious ones stated by the Prime Minister.

There was no pressing national need for the Prime Minister and the Treasurer to precipitate the election and throw the House of Representatives and the Senate out of electoral alignment; and there can be no justification for the waste of 500 000 pounds in having two elections where one alone next year would suffice.

But now that elections for the House of Representatives only are to be held, let me state the position of the Labor Party on issues we will raise, the issues that will decide the result of the elections, so they may be clearly understood and appreciated.

In other words, let me separate the Labor’s Party’s grain from the Liberal and Country party’s chaff. We welcome the chance to do so.

Even more we concentrate on the Australian people, on the chance which is theirs to destroy the Menzies Government. It is time for a change. It is more than time for a change — it is time to give Australia a chance.

The most purblind government supporter cannot deny there is widespread discontent, distrust and boredom with this Government in every section of the community, and perhaps Sir Robert Menzies has become aware of it and has been influenced by it.

Where, for instance, is the direction and drive in Government circles needed to expand our industries and develop our empty north? They just don’t exist. The nation does not surge forward with confidence as it should be doing if we are to survive; it moves along at a jog trot, held back by a Government which swings wildly between deep complacency and violent panic.

The Government suffers from the unsettling complaint called remoteness. Ministers are far too remote from the people and the Prim Minister is even too remote from his ministerial colleagues. I think he does know who they all are; and I think he does nod to each of them occasionally.

But what is now needed is a Government that looks like a Government, that acts like a Government and that listens to what the people want — a Government that trusts the people and is trusted by them in return. Such a Government must be a Labor Government, because only a Labor Government can act as a truly Australian Government should act.

The main issues on which we ask the electorate to vote are the need to promote the economic growth of the nation; its defence and foreign affairs; education and science; housing; health; the development of the north; social services, including child endowments and pensions; full employment; hospital benefits; repatriation; restrictive practices; trade; and the unsatisfactory state of rural industries.

Our policy on rural industries will be stated on Friday evening at Grafton by Mr Pollard, the distinguished Minister for Commerce and Agriculture in the Chifley Government.

Our policy on defence is sound, realistic and inspired by the spirit of Australian nationalism.

On the question of economic growth, we must remember two things. We are a young nation, not only in terms of our history, but in terms of the age of our present population. Half of our present population is under the age of 30 and 1/3rd is in the age group between 5 and 24.

In this dramatic and significant trend in our population lies, at one and the same time, our greatest challenge and our greatest chance. If we meet the challenge now, we can make the youthfulness of our population our springboard to future greatness. If we neglect it, we will cause almost irredeemable harm.

We have it within our power to become the most talented and progressive nation in the world — a nation whose skill and ability can make up, to some extent, our lack of numbers.

It is easy enough to talk of the opportunities before us — it is another thing entirely to face squarely the problems posed by these population trends. Firstly, we must plan for rapid growth to absorb a workforce which is growing at the rate of 2% per year. The numbers needing education will also rise rapidly. And the growing numbers in the marriageable age group means that more and more houses must be built to give a decent start to those seeking to marry and found families.

These are the basic facts of Australian life today, and in those facts lies the hard core of Labor's economic policy — a policy which stands for a spectacular economic growth, a revolution in education and a vigorous housing drive. These are the first things on which we set our sights; we are setting our sights on a great tomorrow.

Labor stands firmly on its policy of full employment — full employment without qualifications. That means that every Australian willing and able to work must have the opportunity to work. We will never permit a repetition of the waste and hardship of the past three years.

On the most conservative estimates, 30 million working days were lost to the nation as a direct result of the credit squeeze imposed in November 1960. Not less than 500 million pounds in goods and services were lost to the community forever through the folly and blind complacency of the Menzies Government. The Government deliberately decided to abandon the policy of full employment in an effort to cure economic troubles which were of their own creation.

Cost stability was more important to them than full employment and the avoidance of the preventable misery and distress that followed unemployment and the many business failures. The Australian people were burdened as a consequence for three years. The effects have not yet been entirely obliterated.

The remedial measures which the Labor Party advocated and for which we were so savagely derided were ultimately — but all too tardily, all too reluctantly — applied in principle, if not in all-important details. Yet at the very moment that unemployment has fallen below the intolerable figure of from 80,000 to 100,000, around which it had stood for over two years, the Menzies Government seeks a renewal of its mandate.

Relying on the hope that the public memory is short, the leader-in-waiting of the Liberal Party, the Treasurer, has urged this course upon Sir Robert Menzies. May I repeat the question of Sir Winston Churchill and ask, “what kind of people do they think we are?”

Now, just as the economy emerges from the worst effects of the worst slump since the thirties, there is already speculation about the timing of the next credit squeeze, if this Government should remain in office.

There is one simple reason for this — the credit squeeze is the one economic weapon this Government knows how to wield, and they have wielded it three times in a decade, with disastrous results on each occasion. The credit squeeze is the weapon of people who think of the economy in terms of finance and profits, and not in terms of the employment of men and women, the production of goods and services for the use and benefit, and the progress and development of the nation.

The Labor Party holds as a basic principle that the ultimate credit policy of the nation should rest in the hands of its selected representatives and not be subject to the wishes of whims of financiers or speculators. To secure the proper use of the credit resources of Australia, the Labor Party will use the existing banking powers to control hire purchase and to ensure that credit is given for all legitimate business purposes.

We will plan Australia’s way out of the disastrous cycle of stop and go. Without genuine and sound planning, the economy will suffer further creeping stagnation, periodic booms and busts, and recurring balance of payments crises.

Economic planning is the essential condition for Australia’s continued progress. It is only a speculative boom which can get out of hand — the Labor Party will ensure that there is no speculative boom. We will ensure that land princes do not again rocket out of the reach of the great majority of homebuilders as they did in 1960 under the influence of misguided credit and financial policies.

Labor in office will aim at a rate of national growth — that is, in the increase of all the goods and services produced — of at least $5\frac{1}{2}\%$ annually. The Governor of the Reserve Bank pointed out this year that this rate can be achieved without placing undue strain on our resources and without producing inflation. The rate of growth of $5\frac{1}{2}\%$ annually could be achieved by a suitable working partnership between the Commonwealth and private enterprise, but the Commonwealth Government will have to play the leading part.

A growth rate of $5\frac{1}{2}\%$ is at least $\frac{1}{3}$ faster than the rate of growth achieved by the Menzies Government. In the slump years inflicted by the Government there was, in fact, a fall in the rate of growth. We will ensure that total expenditure on public works is sustained at a level sufficient to stimulate general economic growth.

To achieve the best results, we will:

1. Institute a national planning scheme to coordinate private and public development; to determine from time to time the amount of Commonwealth expenditure required; and, generally, to ensure the best use of our resources.
2. Establish a works planning council to plan public works in co-operation with the States, over at least a five-year period.
3. Establish regional development authorities to provide service and coordinate development within their own regions.

Education is one of the most neglected tasks facing the Governments of Australia today. It has been truly said that education is the most important activity of civilised nations. Labor puts education at the centre of its current thinking.

We unhesitatingly accept the fact that the Commonwealth has a responsibility in regard to education. We will not, as the Menzies Government has done, seek to evade or avoid that responsibility.

We propose, therefore, to establish a Commonwealth Ministry for Education and Science, to act as the instrument of our national policy. We further propose to make an emergency grant of 10 million pounds to the States to overcome the immediate crisis caused by teacher and accommodation shortages.

We will enlarge the Commonwealth scholarships scheme so that students of ability are not debarred because of their parent's financial position. The scheme will also be extended to encourage more students to take degrees at honours standards and to encourage postgraduate studies.

We will increase the number of Commonwealth scholarships from 5000 to 10 000 at an estimated annual charge, or rather investment, of 5 million pounds. We will, however, not be content to deal with education at the top of the pyramid alone, as the Menzies Government has done. We propose, therefore, to establish a system of scholarships on lines similar to the university scholarships for students at technical college and at secondary schools.

When fully implement, the secondary schools scholarships system will be limited in number only by the ability of the pupils to meet the qualifying standards applicable in his or her State. The scholarships, subject to a means test, will be tenable at the Schools of the parent's choice, and will be open to students from Government and non-Government schools.

Such a scheme obviously represents a large and increasing charge to the Commonwealth. For instance, to grant scholarships of 20 pounds a year is estimated to cost about 10 million pounds. But the Labor Party believes that the wastage of talent — a loss that can never be recovered — which results from the inability of thousands of parents to keep their children at school, is costing the community many times more than that.

We further propose to set up an inquiry into all aspects of education in Australia. Similar in its aims and equal in importance to the Murray commission of inquiry into universities, this inquiry will invite evidence from all groups and competent persons interested in all aspects of education, State and private alike, in primary, secondary, technical and teacher training schools. A Labor Government will expect that inquiry to provide a blueprint for education in Australia for the next decade. We will act on the report when we receive it.

We are equally determined that Australia shall play its part in the revolution that is going on in the world around us — the revolution science, technology and automation. We therefore propose:

- To establish a national science foundation to expand, organise, and coordinate scientific education and research.
- Encourage Australian industry by tax concessions to undertake research.

- Arrange for and finance at least 1000 young men and women to be sent overseas each year for technical training.
- Encourage Australian industry both by tax concession and subsidy, to expand its training facilities for technicians and scientific workers.

We aim at spending at least 10 million pounds annually, in the early stages of our program, in this way. We already pay 90 million pounds a year in profit to overseas companies, and the government justifies this on the ground that these companies bring us new techniques and know-how. We pay 15 million pounds a year in royalties for foreign patents and copyright. Unless we take urgent steps now to place Australia in the forefront of the scientific revolution, we are doomed to be a nation of borrowers and imitators, living precariously on the fruits of foreign research.

None of the failures the Menzies Government have been greater than its failure to provide a housing plan for the nation. There are 75 000 applications outstanding on the books of the various State Housing Commissions.

At last census, 170 000 Australian families were classed as living in 'sheds, huts and shared homes'. Over 100 000 dwellings were classified as substandard. There will be a particularly heavy demand for houses for the rest of this year and next year, when large numbers of young people born immediately after the war will be seeking to marry. But nowhere in the Government can we find any sense of urgency about these problems, or even any awareness that such problems exist.

The Labor Party is particularly concerned with the difficulties confronting those young people who wish to build either privately or through State Housing Commissions. Thousands of our young people cannot obtain a loan big enough to bridge the so-called 'deposit gap'. The average cost of a modern home in most cities is 5000 to 6000 pounds. But the maximum loan from most savings banks is 3500 pounds.

In the United States, homeowners have to find only about 10% of the cost of a house as deposit. In Australia the figure is between 30 and 40%. At the same time, housing interest rates are much higher in Australia than in other countries. The average Australian homeowner has to pay about 25% of his earnings in mortgage repayments. In the United States, the figure is about 14%. Australian housing loans carry interest rates of more than 5 ¼% , and 66% are about 6%.

Those are the dry figures, but for thousands of Australians they add up to a lifetime burden of debt and for thousands more they represent a handicap to marriage itself. We plan, quite simply, that Australia will be the best-housed nation in the world. To establish that we will: establish a Homes Finance Commission to provide finance for home construction and to guarantee loans from those willing to lend at low interest rates and on low deposits, amounting to no more than 5 to 10% of the capital cost.

Provide money to the States at 3 ¾% to enable them to reduce rentals and repayment on Housing Commission Homes.

Increase grants to the States of \$20 million for public housing with emphasis on slum clearance and redevelopment projects:

- Ensure a steady and adequate flow of private finance for home building.

- Hold an enquiry into Australia's housing needs, as requested by the State Ministers for Housing. It is 20 years since the last enquiry was held, and that was set up by the Chifley Government.

Australia still remains one of the few advanced countries in the world without a comprehensive system of health and medical services. And yet, because of maladministration, we pay much more for much less than countries like Britain.

Labor will accept the responsibility of providing a free public medical service based on our public hospitals. We will establish a complete national health service to provide general practitioner, specialist, pharmaceutical, hospital, mental health, dental and optical, and hearing appliance services, as was originally intended by the Chifley Government.

We will repeal the requirement that patients must join a registered society to obtain additional Commonwealth benefits, but voluntary insurance will be encouraged. A Labor Government has no intention of hindering private medical practice, or of limiting the freedom of choice of the patient in seeking medical attention. Suggestions we seek to socialise medicine are so much propaganda. We have no such plans, and in any case, the Constitution would not allow it.

We propose: to provide by special grants a salaried specialist service at public hospitals. Particular attention will be given to the provision of surgeons.

To encourage, with adequate subsidies, group arrangements with general practitioners for medical services to groups on either a salaried or per capita basis.

We will provide a salaried medical service in sparsely populated areas, including aboriginal reserves. We will subsidise country medical and nursing services. In cooperation with the Universities and Royal Colleges of Medicine, we will review medical education and training.

We will abolish the 5/ charge for prescription and extend the free list of drugs. We will restore the lifesaving drugs recently removed by Ministerial order. We intend to hold an inquiry into the cost of drugs and its effect in the level of pharmaceutical benefits with a view to ending waste, inefficiency and exploitation.

Under the Menzies Government, the real value of many welfare benefits has been eroded by a decade of inflation. Our object is to restore all social services, without exception, at least to the purchasing power they possessed under the Chifley Government.

We intend to make child endowment of real value to the mothers of Australia. There has been no change in the level of child endowments since 1950, although the basic wage was then 6pounds18, compared with 14pounds8 now. We promise to increase child endowment by paying the following new rates: for the first child, 11/ a week. For the second child, 19/; for the third and subsequent children, 22/. We propose also to extend the endowment to children up to the age of 18 pursuing full time studies at universities.

For the same purpose – that of helping parents – Labor will double the maternity allowance to 30pounds for the first child, rising to 35pounds for the fourth and subsequent children.

Nor will Labor ignore the plight of our elderly citizens. We will provide an additional 10/ a week for married pensioners, ending the extraordinary discrimination against marriage established by the Menzies Government in its last budget.

Labor stands for a high basic minimum rate of pension related to the basic wage for all pensioners, married and single alike, with additional special allowances for those with special needs.

We further propose to help the newcomer to our shores, and to encourage naturalisation by granting entitlement to social services to all citizens, upon naturalisation.

We propose to increase the funeral payment, made to the person who has paid or is liable to pay the cost of a funeral of an age or invalid pensioner from 10pounds to 50pounds.

We will abolish the means test progressively and as opportunity offers.

On September 11, the Menzies Government gagged debates on five Labor amendments to the Repatriation Act, designed to give ex-servicemen a better deal. Every member of the Liberal and Country Parties voted against these amendments, some of which had been submitted by the Returned Servicemen's League. A Labor Government will implement these proposals early next year.

We will: establish a joint parliamentary committee to review the Repatriation Act and its administration; provide that cancer should be treated as a war-caused disease; interpret the onus-of-proof clause to give ex-servicemen the benefit of the doubt where medical opinion differs as to the origin of their disabilities; provide treatment at Repatriation Hospitals for all World War I returned men whether their illnesses were war-caused or not; grant medical benefits to the wives of TPI pensioners.

The position of the Australian aboriginal community causes all socially minded citizens deep concern. The whole question is clouded by the inability of the Commonwealth to accept full responsibility for aborigines as it does other citizens, and their legal status varies from State to State and from Territory to Territory. This produces a chain reaction of social and other disabilities, and these can only effectively be removed by amendments to sections 51 and 27 of the Constitution. This we will try to do.

Australia's future prosperity depends on our ability to expand our trade in existing markets and to find and develop new ones. After a temporary flurry generated by Britain's abortive attempt to enter the European Common Market last year, the Menzies Government has quickly returned to its customary lethargy.

A short-sighted dependence on overseas capital has obscured the fact that Australia is simply not paying her way. A Labor Government will embark on a bold program of trade expansion. We believe that the improvement of our external trade depends on a vigorous assertion of national interests by the Government. It requires an Australian Labor Government to do that.

Australia must be bolder and more enterprising in promoting trade. Our trading interest is better served by Australians than by foreign shippers, middlemen and merchants who tie us to declining European markets. Under Labor, Australia will be prepared to trade anywhere in the world.

This requires:

An Australian shipping commission to operate overseas and coastal ships to the greatest extent possible consistent with out available financial resources. We will discuss with the New Zealand government the possibility of establishing a joint shipping line.

A Commonwealth export bank to provide credit facilities for exporters of both primary and secondary goods.

An overseas trade commission, whose functions will include the investigation of franchise or licensing agreements, which prevent or restrict the export of any commodity from Australia; and to take or recommend action for their removal; and to pursue the promotion of Australian trade generally.

Under the Menzies Government, the country has been faced with recurring balance of payment crises. Our balance of payments has been propped up only by dangerous and increasing reliance on capital inflow from abroad.

Australia cannot, without peril, without risk of losing her economic and part of her national independence, continue indefinitely this rake's progress of overseas borrowing.

I make it absolutely clear that the Labor Party welcomes overseas investment when it brings new industries, employment opportunities and new technologies. We do not welcome speculative capital, or capital which merely replaces foreign for Australian ownership in an established industry.

Labor is vitally concerned lest the control of key assets and industries fall completely into non-Australian hands, with the result that the control of the economy is removed from Australia to the financial centres of New York, London, Paris and certain Asian capitals as well.

After careful enquiry, we propose to introduce legislation designed to give Australians a certain percentage of the ownership of foreign-controlled companies and to discourage the takeover of established Australian industries.

We will seek to protect existing Australian manufacturing industries now threatened by foreign takeovers and unfair foreign competition by adopting the following measures:

We will strengthen and streamline the Tariff Board to prevent delays in tariff decisions that could ruin an industry. We will ensure that if there is a doubt on whether an industry needs protection, the industry will always be given the benefit of the doubt. We will not hesitate to impose import controls for protective purposes if other protective devices fail.

As 30 years have passed since a committee was set up by the Bruce-Page Government to review Australia's tariff policy, it seems appropriate that the report of that body should be reviewed by a committee in 1964 in light of experience. Accordingly, it will be done.

Legislation to protect the public against exploitation by monopolies and combines was promised by Sir Robert Menzies as long ago as 1949, and the promise has been repeated again and again since then — but volumes of words have never been translated into action.

The Prime Minister has apparently assured the great vested interests behind his party that no action will be taken to implement the proposals put forward by the Attorney General.

Labor will legislate to prevent exploitation and wasteful restrictive trade practices by monopoly interests, but it will protect small businesses, particularly small shopkeepers, and not seek to harm them as Sir Garfield Barwick proposes to do. We will seek from the people the powers recommended by the joint committee of constitutional review on this question.

A Labor Government will honour Australia's international obligations by ratifying the ILO convention on the question of equal pay for work of equal value. We will support the adoption of this principle before the relevant Federal tribunals. Labor will put this principle into effect in the Commonwealth Public Service and Commonwealth Government instrumentalities.

Labor is opposed to the policy of penal provision for contempt in industrial legislation. Early action will be taken to amend the pertinent penal provisions of sections 109 and 111 of the Commonwealth Arbitration Act.

Labor will establish a productivity index and will also establish a representative committee of review to prepare recommendations in an advisory capacity to the Commonwealth Statistician. We shall intervene before the Arbitration Commission to support the ACTU and the AWU for an immediate restoration of automatic quarterly adjustments of the cost of living.

Labor, recognising the importance of apprenticeship in the framework of a rapidly developing Australia, will do everything possible to train more apprentices to satisfy the needs of Australian industry. Labor will review the Commonwealth Employee's Compensation Act with a view to removing existing injustices and providing satisfactory machinery for the hearing of claims.

This important section of the Australian work force, sometimes referred to as 'white collar workers', have, to an increasing degree, joined with other industrial organisations represented by the ACTU before the Arbitration Commission to seek better remuneration and conditions of employment.

The Menzies Government, however, in a deliberate attempt to depress the salaries of the section, has tried to separate them from those represented by the ACTU and to deny them wage and salary justice."

Source: Compiled from original documents.