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3393

Article for Italian Press

The Australian Labor Party (S.A. Branch) held its annual conference in Adelaide recently. At the opening session it was addressed by the Federal Leader of the Labor Party, Hon. A.A. Calwell, M.H.R. and its Deputy Leader, Mr. E. G. Whitlam, M.H.R.

The incoming president of the Labor Party, Mr. Don Dunstan M.P., in moving a vote of thanks to Mr. Calwell, pointed out that he had, during the Government of Mr. Curtin and Mr. Chifley been an outstandingly successful Minister. It was Mr. Calwell who, against the protests of the Liberals, planned and commenced Australia's post-war immigration programme. When the Liberals won office in Canberra they had not dared to interfere greatly with the great immigration programme Mr. Calwell had put into effect - indeed the only major alteration to that programme was to place restrictions on immigration from Southern European countries - particularly from Italy and Greece.

Mr. Calwell pointed out that the Australian Labor Party had been founded by Australian working men because the wealthy exploited the workers and had controlled governments to maintain a privileged position for a minority. The Labor Movement through the work of trades unions and the work of the Labor Party, which must always be based on the trades unions, had been responsible for fair hours of work and reasonable working conditions, full employment had first been achieved under Labor Governments when the "Liberals" had stated that it was impossible and every major advance in the provision of social services to assist the poor, the sick, and the aged had been due to the Labor Party. The Labor Party was the only party representing the little people - the laborers, the small businessmen, the shopkeepers and artisans, the clerks and shop assistants, the teachers and professional men and the families of all these. The Liberal Party, since it came to office in 1949 had persistently scaled down social service benefits and restricted

State Governments spending on the services those Governments were supposed to provide. Education was now not properly provided for, child endowment now had less than half the real value which it had under Labor, allowances to pensioners' dependants had declined in value, free public hospitals, provided by Labor, had been abolished by the Liberals. The Liberals had sent their advocates into the Arbitration Court to oppose the Unions' application to keep adjusting wages according to the cost of living. Thus the standards of the small people were being attacked and decreased by the Liberals - it was the task of Labor to fight to maintain and improve those standards.

Mr. Whitlam M.H.R. emphasised the continual trend to the development of large monopolies in Australia which were free, under the constitution, to act to the detriment of the Australian people. The constitution he said was a document prepared many years ago by men who could not and did not see today's economic development. Its provisions mean that although Governments were elected to carry out policies of planning for

Australia's economic development, those policies, which the majority wanted, were prevented by the dead hand of the constitution. A first task for Labor then was constitutional reform to allow the people as a whole to choose the policies they wanted.

The Leader of the Labor Party in the South Australian Parliament, Mr. M. R. O'Halloran M.P. pointed out that Labor in South Australia still faced the problem of an undemocratic electoral system. In South Australia although the large majority of the people always voted Labor at the elections, an anti-Labor government had been in office for over 20 years on a minority vote. They did this by arranging electoral districts in such a way that some districts containing less than 6,000 votes elected one member to Parliament and other districts containing more than 28,000 voters also^{only} elected one member to Parliament.

Two-Thirds of the people of South Australia had the right under this law to elect only one third of the members of Parliament. This had meant that this State had the worst social services - education, care of the poor and sick, the worst hospitals, and the worst provision for industrial safety and working standards of any State in Australia. Despite the difficulties of the unjust electoral system, the Labor Party in South Australia needed to win only two seats from the Government to win the next elections and he was confident it would do so.

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